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## THESIS

THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON STATE  
CONTROL OF CIVIL SOCIETY: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN  
VIETNAM DURING AUTARKY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

by

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SOCIETY: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM DURING AUTARKY  
AND INTERDEPENDENCE

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This thesis examines how globalization has affected Vietnam's view and treatment of religious institutions. In a larger context, it argues that the conditions of globalization foster increased liberalism and the latent development of civil society. The implications of globalization on religion in Vietnam are explored through a case study of the Catholic Church in Vietnam from 1975 to 2004. The Catholic Church is examined during two different periods: during autarky from 1975 to the *Doi Moi* reforms in 1986, and during international interdependence from 1987 to 2004.

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The thesis concludes that in order to foster religious freedom and build civil society, policy makers should implement policies that engage rather than isolate. Engagement policies tend to increase a country's degree of global interdependency and integration with the world economy and community. As the level of interdependency increases, countries tend to become more subject to international norms and standards.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	3
B.	EVOLUTION OF VIETNAM’S REGIME TYPE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD.....	4
C.	METHODOLOGY .....	9
D.	SOURCES.....	11
II.	HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT .....	13
A.	CATHOLICISM IN VIETNAM THROUGH 1975 .....	13
B.	RELIGION, RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITY ....	19
C.	FROM AUTARKY TO DOI MOI: 1975 TO 1986 .....	21
	1. Diplomatic and Foreign Relations.....	21
	2. Economy.....	23
	3. Society and Social Integration .....	24
D.	FROM DOI MOI TO COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE: 1987 TO PRESENT .....	25
	1. Diplomatic and Foreign Relations.....	26
	2. Economy.....	28
	3. Society and Social Integration .....	30
E.	CONCLUSION .....	32
III.	THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM, 1975 – 1987.....	35
A.	INITIAL IMPACT OF REUNIFICATION ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.....	36
	1. Arrests and Re-education.....	37
	2. Contact with the Vatican.....	38
	3. Breakup of Church Social Linkages and Organizational Infrastructure in the South .....	39
	4. Control of the Internal Affairs.....	40
	5. Crafting the Party’s View of Catholicism.....	41
B.	CODIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS CONTROL.....	42
C.	KEEPING THE FAITH AMIDST SUPPRESSION .....	47
D.	STATE COOPTATION OF THE CHURCH .....	49
E.	CONCLUSION .....	52
IV.	THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM, 1987 – 2004.....	55
A.	CHANGING VCP VIEWS TOWARD THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ....	56
B.	STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN.....	59
C.	THE AUTONOMY OF THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD .....	63
D.	ROLE WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY.....	68
	1. Church-Sponsored Charity.....	69
	2. Catholic Schools and Institutions .....	71
	3. Foreign Non-governmental Organizations.....	72

E.	LEVEL OF ACTIVITY .....	72
1.	The La Vang Pilgrimage .....	72
2.	Comparison of Church Statistics from 1998 to 2004 .....	74
3.	International Observations of Increased Church Activity.....	76
F.	CHANGES IN GOVERNMENTAL REGULATIONS OF RELIGION..	77
G.	A TACIT INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS.....	78
H.	VCP RECOGNITION OF INTERNATIONAL NORMS .....	81
I.	CONCLUSION .....	82
V.	CONCLUSION .....	85
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	91
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	99

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Catholic Bishop Ordinations in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam .....66
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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Major Modern Regime Ideal Types and Their Defining Characteristics. ....	5
Table 4.	General Statistics about Vietnam.....	75

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The 1992 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam states in Article 70 that "the citizen shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any religion ... All religions are equal before the law." The article concludes with the negating caveat, "No one can violate freedom of belief and of religion; nor can anyone misuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and State policies." The broad language of the constitution authorizes the Vietnamese government under the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) to suppress and control any religion or belief the government deems contravenes the laws of Vietnam, poses a threat to internal stability, or potential delegitimizes the leading position of the VCP in Vietnamese society. In Vietnam, any organizations autonomous from the VCP, particularly religious ones, threaten the VCP's legitimacy and ability to implement policy with impunity. To prevent such potential threats from civil society and ensure the country progresses in the direction the VCP leads, the VCP must continue to co-opt and maintain control of civil society—particularly religion.<sup>1</sup>

In the court of international opinion and perception, Vietnam's methods of restricting and controlling religions often contravene basic human and civil rights.<sup>2</sup> As Vietnam moves away from isolationism and becomes more integrated into both the world economy and community, Vietnam's development becomes more subject to international norms and opinion. This begs the question: What effect will Vietnam's further

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<sup>1</sup> Civil society consists of autonomous and independent institutions which operate between the people and the government. The role of civil society is to allow citizens to express their interests, concerns, and ideas; to positively shape their community, and to check authority of the state and hold it accountable. Civil society includes many groups: civic, issue-oriented, educational, health, and religious to name a few. See Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, "An Approach for Analyzing State-Society Relations in Vietnam," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 16 (2001), 241; Larry Diamond, *Development Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 221; and Suchit Bunbongkarn, "The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation in Asia," *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition*, 138; available from <http://www.apcss.org/Publications/SAS/> SASAP Response 030320/Regionalfinal.htm; internet; accessed 15 July 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* both emphatically state that everyone has the right to freedom of religion. Furthermore, both declarations state that individuals have the right in public or in private to worship, observe, and practice their chosen religion. For the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* see article 18; viewed at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights/html>; accessed on 11 March 2005. For the *United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* see Part III, article 18; viewed at <http://www.ibiblio.org/ais/iccpr.htm>; viewed on 11 March 2005.

integration into the world economy and community have on Vietnam's restrictions on religious institutions and control of religious freedom? To this end, my thesis will explore how globalization affects Vietnam's view and treatment of religion in Vietnam. In a larger context, my thesis will address how and why the conditions of globalization foster increased liberalism and the latent development of civil society.

To understand the implications of globalization for religion in Vietnam, we must first define globalization. Joseph Nye defined globalization as "the condition of networks of worldwide interdependence."<sup>3</sup> The concept of "worldwide interdependence" is readily understood in the context of international trade. For example, country A may depend on country B for a specific product while country B on the other hand depends on country A for a different product. Thus, the shared dependence upon one another creates a condition of interdependence. On a larger scale, the complexity of international trade results in more interdependence. The networks can be trade networks, security networks, special interests networks, or a host of other areas in which countries may share common interests.

Contemporary global networks are distinguished from past conditions of globalization in that modern-day networks affect and involve more "people from more regions and social classes."<sup>4</sup> Technological innovations such as air travel, telecommunications, the computer, and most recently the internet have facilitated and empowered the access of previously less powerful actors in the arenas of international finance, economic, and transnational interest groups. The increased speed of communications, the increased numbers of connections between societies and interests groups, and the increased complexity of these connections are indicative of contemporary globalization.<sup>5</sup> Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye appropriately described globalization as it exists today as "complex interdependence."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't go it Alone* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 78 – 88.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>5</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd ed. (Harper Collins Publishers, 1989), 23. Keohane and Nye argue that "complex interdependence" is the opposite of realism. I modify this somewhat and use complex interdependence to serve as the opposite of autarky.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 23 -36.

Globalization under the conditions of complex interdependence holds significant implications for domestic and international actors. The conditions of complex interdependence change the amount and nature of power that states can wield against other states and against their own societies.<sup>7</sup> Before a domestic or foreign policy is implemented, a state in a complex interdependent world must take into consideration how other actors with which it has an interdependent relationship may react to the policy. In many instances for a state to gain and maintain access to certain trade or security benefits enjoyed by members of an international and interdependent trade or security network, that state must comply with the groups' accepted norms of behavior. For example, to access the trade benefits that come from acceding to the World Trade Organization (WTO), a state must accept, implement, and follow the financial and legal norms and standards of the WTO. State policy that deviates from these norms and standards could likely result in sanctions or some other undesirable consequence. Thus, in a complex interdependent system, states have strong incentives to try to maximize their interest by adapting to and adhering to international and global norms. Thus it logically follows that as Vietnam seeks entry into such networks it will have to take into account their international norms and standards. What follows is an examination of the manner in which Vietnam has done this and its impact on religion.

#### A. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the introduction of *Doi Moi*, the end of the Cold War, and the increase in the “speed and thickness” of globalization, the VCP has sought to open and develop its economy in order to maintain its hold on domestic power.<sup>8</sup> As the VCP has sought to integrate Vietnam's economy into the international economy, become a more recognized member of international society, and reap the benefits from participation in the international system, it has slowly and gradually acquiesced to international pressures and

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<sup>7</sup> Keohane and Nye, 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Nye, 87. “Thickness” refers to the increase of interconnections in the global setting while “quickness” refers to the increased speed at which events in one part of the global network can affect another part.

begun accepting and incorporating internationally accepted norms.<sup>9</sup> For Vietnam and other autocratic states, joining liberal international economic institutions has the potential to slowly foster liberalization.

If this holds true, then in today's world of complex interdependence, Vietnam should be increasingly less inclined to blatantly contravene the internationally accepted norms of religious freedom. Furthermore, as Vietnam moves from an autarkic position vis-à-vis the international community to a complex interdependent one, its restrictions against and control over religious institutions should decrease. The overall degree of religious freedom enjoyed by Vietnamese should increase as a result of Vietnam's position vis-à-vis the international community and degree of interdependence with that community. Under the conditions of globalization and complex interdependency, it becomes less in the interests of the VCP to restrict and control religious institutions in the same manner as during previous states of autarky.

#### B. EVOLUTION OF VIETNAM'S REGIME TYPE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a one-party state structured after what T. H. Rigby has called "mono-organizational socialism."<sup>10</sup> The VCP organizes Vietnamese society such that all aspects of society fall under the control and domination of the party structure. However, empirical cases of mono-organizational socialism such as the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to name just a few, show an array of variance in mono-organizational socialism. Mono-organizational socialism remains an important and germane concept to understanding how the VCP continues to dominate Vietnamese society, however, a more concise and detailed typology of regime structure for Vietnam is offered by Juan Linz and Albert

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Risse, "International Norms and Domestic Change: Arguing and Communicative Behavior in the Human Rights Area," in *Politics & Society* 27 (December 1999): 529.

<sup>10</sup> T. H. Rigby, "Mono-Organizational Socialism and the Civil Society" in *The Transition from Socialism: State and Civil Society in the USSR*, Chadrán Kukathas, David W. Lovell and William Maley eds. (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1991), 111-112.



Table 1. Major Modern Regime Ideal Types and Their Defining Characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Characteristic	Authoritarianism	Totalitarianism	Post-totalitarianism	Sultanism
Pluralism	Limited but not responsive pluralism. Allows for limited civil society.	No (monocratic)	Limited but not responsive semi-pluralism ('parallel culture', 'second economy'), no political pluralism (but fractionalization within regime institutions)	Limited but not responsive, unpredictable and erratic
Ideology	Without elaborate and guiding ideology but with distinctive mentalities.	Central.	Exists, but weakened commitment.	May be pro forma, but de facto meaningless.
Mobilization	Non-extensive and low intensity	Vast mobilization, guided	Ritualized, meaningless, declining. Boredom, withdrawal.	Low but occasional.
Leadership	Self-proclaimed, limited but formally ill-defined	Self-proclaimed, undefined limits, unpredictable scope, indefinite.	Self-proclaimed, increasingly predictable ('bureaucratization of leadership selection'), de facto limits (but still formally ill-defined), trend from indefinite to temporary leadership	Highly personalistic and arbitrary, erratic limits, arbitrary and unpredictable scope, indefinite

Stepan.<sup>12</sup> They distinguish the following four types of non-democratic political systems: Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism, Post-totalitarianism, and Sultanism (See table 1).

Vietnam does not completely fit the characteristics of any one typology. However, out of the four, Vietnam most reflects post-totalitarianism in three ways. First, in post-totalitarianism an "important ideological legacy" continues that cannot be ignored or questioned officially. However, there is a weakening of actual belief in the ideology as the foundation of the regime's legitimacy. Thus regimes will tend to base their legitimacy on performance criteria.<sup>13</sup> As will be discussed in chapter two, in 1986 Vietnam ideologically veered away from communism by embracing market reforms—the

<sup>11</sup> Table manipulated and simplified by author. Table and data derived from Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 44-45.

<sup>12</sup> Juan Linz and Albert Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 49.

so called *Doi Moi* reforms.<sup>14</sup> Presently, Vietnam continues to proclaim allegiance to Marxism-Leninism as its guiding ideology.<sup>15</sup> However, in reality, the VCP bases its legitimacy on a variety of potential sources, most notably economic development and the party's role in staging a successful indigenous revolutionary struggle for independence and unification.

Second, post-totalitarianism posits that the "means of mobilization still dominate," yet they have lost their intensity.<sup>16</sup> In Vietnam the VCP still has the capacity to mobilize society for rallies or campaigns; yet today, Vietnamese are more concerned with personal economic betterment than the government's latest campaign to end "social evils."<sup>17</sup> Mobilization efforts have become ritualized, lacking the fervor and devotion to a cause they once exhibited during wars with France and America. Finally, in post-totalitarianism there is a "disjunction between ideological claims and reality." The VCP publicly lauds the glories of communism and its primary role in guiding the country and society. In reality, Vietnam's interests are today shaped more by global economic issues.<sup>18</sup>

A limited nascent civil society exists in post-totalitarian Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> The VCP fears the spread of civil society with its latent potential to create political pressure for

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<sup>14</sup> The Sixth Communist Party Congress instituted *Doi Moi* (renovation) in December 1986 as a program to reform and revitalize Vietnam's stagnant economy. See, Viet D. Dinh, "Financial Reform and Economic Development in Vietnam," *Law and Policy in International Business* 28 (1997): 857.

<sup>15</sup> Marxism-Leninism includes the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialist ownership of the means of production, class struggle, collectivization, leading role of the communist party, and the principle of democratic centralism. For additional information of Marxism-Leninism. See Robert C. Tucker, *The Marxian Revolution Idea* (New York: Norton & Company, 1969), passim 54-84.

<sup>16</sup> Linz and Stepan, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Templer, *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 250-251.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Fforde and Stefan de Vylder, *From Plan to Market: The Economic Transition in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1996), 303-307; Henry Kamm, *Dragon Ascending: Vietnam and the Vietnamese* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996), 203-210; and Templer, 352-355.

<sup>19</sup> Linz and Stepan, 43. Since the *Doi Moi* reforms were initiated in 1986, Vietnam's samizdat literature has flourished. See Zachary Abuza, *Renovating Politics in Contemporary Vietnam*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 139-142.

reform, liberalization, and possible democratic usurpation of the Party's control.<sup>20</sup> Among the different parts of civil society, religion is a key potential threat to the VCP's monopoly hold on power. The very nature of religion runs counter to the VCP's dominance in guiding all aspects of society to include ideology, social organizations, education, and social work. Religion in Vietnam is one of the most important social influences in society.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, unless the doctrine and preaching of a religion is controlled or co-opted by the VCP, it is a potential threat to the VCP's quest to control all aspects of society. Religious institutions also have the inherent proclivity to organize and guide the beliefs of its adherents. Thus, for the VCP, religious institutions have a capacity to become the focus of political opposition.<sup>22</sup> Globalization increases religious groups' ability to network internationally, which in turn exacerbates the threat of religious institutions advocating an agenda that contradicts VCP's party line. As religious groups interact more, become more interconnected, and identify more with the larger international community of their faith they are increasingly exposed to religious agendas which advocate tenets and doctrines that are likely to be contrary to the VCP line.

Restrictions and control of religious institutions have become more complex as Vietnam emerged from geopolitical autarky (1976 to 1986) into a period of increasing global interdependence (1987 to present). The desperate social and economic situations in Vietnam from 1975 to 1986 threatened to delegitimize the VCP.<sup>23</sup> The leadership of

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<sup>20</sup> Abuza, 9-15. Abuza makes the argument that Vietnam has not democratized like many former communist states because it has prevented "agents of change" or groups in civil society from emerging and demanding change. See also Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution," in *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition*, eds. Ramses Amer and Carlyle A. Thayer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 13-16.

<sup>21</sup> Charles F. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), passim 181-245.

<sup>22</sup> Shaun Kingsley Malarney, "Return to the Past? Dynamics of Contemporary Religious and Ritual Transformation," in *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*, ed. Hy V. Luong (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003), 226. In fact, recent cases of democratization in East Europe (Poland and East Germany) and Asia (Korea and the Philippines) in the 1980s show that religious organizations in general and Christian churches in particular often are at the center of civil society protest against autocratic rule. See Diamond, 235-236.

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3-6. For details on Vietnam's social and economic failures see Nguyen Van Canh, *Vietnam Under Communism: 1975-1982* (Stanford University: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), passim, and especially 259 - 260.

the VCP recognized that the Party had to reform its economic policies to maintain legitimacy in order to preserve its power.

During the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986, the VCP approved the policy of *Doi Moi* (economic renovation). With the ongoing reforms initiated by *Doi Moi*, the VCP began basing its legitimacy on the performance of the market and not the infallibility of Marxist-Leninist ideology. The implementation of *Doi Moi* also led to the redirection of Vietnam's foreign and economic policy focus. *Doi Moi* effectively shifted Vietnam out its autarkic geopolitical existence into the social, economic, and geopolitical dynamics of twentieth-first century globalization.

It is in this context that recent scholarship on Vietnam has examined the changes that have taken place as a result of the *Doi Moi* reforms in a more interdependent regional and global economy. Carlye Thayer argues that the reform process in Vietnam post-*Doi Moi* has resulted in the relaxation of Vietnam's mono-organizational "grip" on society and that a nascent civil society is emerging.<sup>24</sup> Melanie Beresford indicates that the VCP has been responsive to pressures from below and recognizes the "existence of independent sources of political power" emerging in Vietnamese society.<sup>25</sup> Shaun Malarney has argued that in the realm of post-socialist political culture, Vietnam is "moving down the path of pluralization."<sup>26</sup> He suggests that since the mid-1980's the VCP has relaxed its control over cultural affairs and that concurrently, "a blossoming of religion has occurred."<sup>27</sup> Gareth Porter has gone further, arguing that "Vietnamese society has been undergoing a process of creeping pluralism which is bound to accelerate in the 1990s."<sup>28</sup> Mandy Thomas asserted that the state's ability to determine and control

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<sup>24</sup> Carlye A. Thayer, "Political Reform in Vietnam: Doi Moi and the Emergence of Civil Society," in *The Development of Civil Society in Communist Systems*, ed. Robert F. Miller (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 111-112.

<sup>25</sup> Melanie Beresford, *National Unification and Economic Development in Vietnam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 116-118.

<sup>26</sup> Shaun Kingsley Malarney, "Culture, Virtue, And Political Transformation In Contemporary Northern Viet Nam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56 (November 1997): 918.

<sup>27</sup> Shaun Kingsley Malarney, *Return to the Past? Dynamics of Contemporary Religious and Ritual Transformation*, in "Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society," ed. Hy V. Luong (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003), 225.

<sup>28</sup> Gareth Porter, *Vietnam: The Politics of Bureaucratic Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 164.

Vietnamese society has been dwindling since the late 1980s.<sup>29</sup> She argues the VCP can still mobilize crowds and shape some aspects of cultural life, but cannot prevent unofficial and even unauthorized crowds, determine popular entertainment or who becomes national celebrities. Other scholars have made similar connections between reforms introduced from *Doi Moi* and pressures from various parts of society resulting in salient policy changes.<sup>30</sup>

This literature elucidates how and why Vietnam implemented the *Doi Moi* reforms. The literature also shows how the *Doi Moi* reforms resulted in Vietnam emerging from autarky and entering globalization. The literature does not however, satisfactorily elucidate the effects and impacts of the external influences of globalization on post-*Doi Moi* Vietnam.

I propose to bridge this gap in the literature by examining the effect Vietnam's further integration into globalization has had on religious freedom in Vietnam. In a broader context, I examine the effects of globalization on civil society in states led by autocratic governments. Additionally, in light of the implications of globalization on religion, I conclude by offering policy recommendations for the United States with regard to Vietnam and autocratic regimes in general.

### C. METHODOLOGY

To examine the implications of globalization on religion in Vietnam, I will use a case study which examines the Catholic Church in Vietnam from 1975 to present. I have selected the Catholic Church over other religious groups in Vietnam for two primary reasons. First, the preponderance of Catholics in Vietnam are ethnic Vietnamese and are not viewed as a group with separatists potential, as some Protestants are. Many of the marginalized ethnic minority groups living in Vietnam's central highlands have large Protestants populations. The Vietnamese government views many of these ethnic minority Protestants church's as aiding and abetting separatists and anti-government

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<sup>29</sup> Mandy Thomas, "Public Spaces/Public Disgraces: Crowds and the State in Contemporary Vietnam," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 16 (2001): 306-307.

<sup>30</sup> See Adam Fforde, *The Agrarian Question in North Vietnam 1974-79—A Study of Cooperator Resistance to State Policy* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 203-205; and Benedict Kerkvliet, "Village-State Relations in Vietnam: The Effect of Everyday Politics on Decollectivization," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 54 (May 1995): 396-418.

agendas. Therefore, among Protestants in Vietnam it is problematic in determining whether restrictive or suppressive religious policies are inspired to curb separatist activity, reflect a general anti-religious party line, or are simply an extension of existing Vietnamese discriminatory practices towards ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, there are many differences among Protestantism's many sects. The experiences and treatment received by one Protestant church can vary considerably to that of other Protestant church. A case study on Protestantism presents too many variables to control for, given space and research limitations. The study of Catholics in Vietnam does not present any of these problems to the degree Protestants does.

The second primary reason for selecting the Catholic Church in Vietnam as my case study is largely utilitarian: comparatively, there is a wealth of available sources. The Buddhist, Hoa Hoa, and Cao Dai religions all have intriguing histories; however, in each case I faced a dearth of sources to which I could access and read in English. In addition to availability of sources, the Catholic Church was an obvious choice for my case study because of the Church's history in Vietnam, its demographics, and the relationship of the Vietnamese Catholic Church to the universal Catholic Church headquartered at the Vatican.

The case study of the Catholic Church in Vietnam examines Vietnam's interactions, suppression, restrictions, and control of the Catholic Church during Vietnam's period of autarky from 1975 to 1986 and increased interdependence from 1987 to present. The independent variable is Vietnam's degree of international interdependence and the dependent variable is the Catholic Church's degree of freedom in Vietnam. Vietnam's view and treatment of the Catholic Church are the indicators used to determine the Catholic Church's degree of religious freedom during Vietnam's period of autarky compared to its period of global interdependence.

Chapter two accomplishes three tasks. First, it provides the historical background for my study of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Second, it establish the foundation for my first intervening variable—Vietnam's view of the Catholic Church—by examining the VCP's view of religion and religious institutions in Vietnamese society. Finally, chapter two lays out the independent variable—Vietnam's degree of international interdependence—by examining Vietnam's isolation during the period of autarky from

1975 to 1986 and by examining Vietnam's increased international interdependence from 1987 to 2004.

Chapter three shows how during Vietnam's period of autarky, the Catholic Church was suppressed, severely restricted, and controlled by Vietnam's VCP-led government. It uses Vietnam's view and treatment of the Catholic Church as the primary indicators to elucidate the Catholic Church's low degree of religious freedom during this period. The chapter focuses on post-reunification suppression of the Catholic Church and Vietnamese laws and regulations used to restrict and control the Church.

Chapter four looks at Vietnam's view and treatment of the Catholic Church Vietnam's period of increased international interdependence. The chapter examines official government statements on the Church, engagement with the Vatican, status of priests, Church activity levels, the Church's societal involvement, changes in government regulations, and trends in international reports on religion in Vietnam. The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate changes to the indicators of the Catholic Church's degree of religious freedom in Vietnam. The impact and implications of these changes is discussed in the last chapter.

Chapter five presents my case study's conclusion on the Catholic Church in Vietnam. It shows that the Catholic Church's overall degree of religious freedom was greater during Vietnam's period of international integration than during its period of autarky. The pressures that global engagement and interdependence bring to bear on nations tend to foster increased levels increased levels of liberalization and civil society.

#### D. SOURCES

This thesis draws from contemporary scholarly literature, government and nongovernmental organizations' documents, and news reports to establish a historical, economic, and geopolitical context upon which to frame the case study. I use a wealth of reports on the status of religion in Vietnam and Vietnam's global integration from such sources as the United States government, international human rights groups, international economic organizations, and other international nongovernmental organizations. To elucidate the more nuanced details of the case study, I draw from press releases and official statements from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. I also draw heavily from

various media sources that specialize in Catholic Church news. Finally, I draw from the reports of numerous human rights and religious freedom organizations.



## II. HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

This chapter begins with the historical background of Catholicism in Vietnam through 1975—the year my study begins—in order to establish a historical content in which to explore why the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) views religious institutions, the Catholic Church in particular, with suspicion and as a threat to the Party’s dominance and control of society and government. Next, I lay the foundation for my analysis of the methods and policies used by the VCP to suppress, co-opt, and control religions. Finally, I examine how and why the VCP transitioned from a closed autarkic outlook to an outlook open to globalization and international interdependence.

### A. CATHOLICISM IN VIETNAM THROUGH 1975

Catholicism has existed in Vietnam for over 400 years. French Jesuit Father Alexander de Rhodes established the Catholic mission in Vietnam in 1627. Christianity provided an alternative from the rigid strictures of a hierarchal Confucian society. Catholicism held the appeal of salvation and community for many poor Vietnamese marginalized by the Confucian elite.<sup>31</sup> By 1663, the Catholic population in the north hit 200,000—approximately 10 percent of the northern population.<sup>32</sup> The rapid spread of Catholicism worried Vietnamese rulers. They viewed Catholicism as an ideological threat to the existing Confucian order. Vietnamese rulers were also concerned about Catholicism’s latent potential to introduce negative foreign influences and domination to Vietnam. Consequently, beginning in the seventeenth century, Vietnamese rulers began persecuting and banning Catholics.<sup>33</sup> In response to reports of both persecution and missionary success, the Pope authorized the formation of the Society of Foreign Missions in France in 1662 to engage in missionary work in Vietnam.

The Church continued to grow into the eighteenth century. By 1756, there were 300,000 members. Most members lived in rural areas where Confucianism was not as

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<sup>31</sup> Templer, 263-264.

<sup>32</sup> Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Bo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Templer, 263.

strong as in the urban areas.<sup>34</sup> Missionaries took advantage of the widespread political turmoil of the eighteenth century to reach out to the poor, disenfranchised, and those disillusioned with the ruler's efforts to bolster Confucianism.<sup>35</sup>

Towards the end of the eighteenth century as Tay Son Rebellion forces threatened to conquer all of Vietnam, a French Catholic priest aided the Nguyen court to turn the tides of the rebellion in favor of the Nguyen Lords.<sup>36</sup> In return for help rendered during the rebellion, the first Nguyen emperor, Gia Long, (r. 1802-1820) provided nominal protection for missionary work. Subsequent Nguyen emperors reversed the court's position and implemented severe anti-Catholic persecution and suppression campaigns against both Vietnamese Catholics and foreign missionaries.<sup>37</sup> The severe persecution during the nineteenth century incited missionary fervor in France. This fervor led to a dramatic increase in attention and support in France for missionary efforts in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> The dramatic nation-wide increase in attention and support in France for missionary work in Vietnam resulted in an increase in conversions in spite of persecutions.<sup>39</sup> It also led to French protection of foreign missionaries which then resulted in the pretext for French intervention and eventual colonialization of Vietnam in 1883. This connection between French Catholic missionaries and the subtle introduction of French colonization tainted the Church's credibility in the eyes of the Nguyen and later Communist rulers.

As the southern portion of Vietnam, Cochin China, became a French colony in 1859, the Vietnamese's worst fears about Catholicism came to pass—Catholicism led to foreign domination. By 1883, France absorbed the remaining portions of Vietnam, Annam-central Vietnam and Tonkin-north Vietnam, as French protectorates. In Tonkin,

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<sup>34</sup> Templer, 263..

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya and Yoneo Ishii, "Religious Development in Southeast Asia, c. 1500-1800," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 213.

<sup>36</sup> For information of this see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 75-76; Nicolas Tarling, "The Establishment of the Colonial Regimes," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 2, part 1, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 38.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on the Nguyen persecutions against Catholics see Gheddo, 9; Templer, 264.

<sup>38</sup> Nola Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics and Others in the Pages of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (June 2004): 264, 273-275.

<sup>39</sup> There were 310,000 converts in 1800; 420,000 in 1840; 708,000 in 1890. See Gheddo, 13-15.

nationalistic French priests directly aided France in establishing its dominance in Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> During uprisings against French subjugation, many Vietnamese Catholics were targeted as French loyalist. When in fact, many Catholics were ardent nationalists, actively opposed foreign domination, and joined Catholic dominated nationalistic movements.<sup>41</sup>

During World War II (1941-1945) many Catholic nationalists supported resistance efforts against the Japanese. When Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence after World War Two on September 2, 1945, Catholics initially joined Ho's government. After France attempted to reassert colonial control beginning in October 1945, Catholics joined with the Viet Minh in a united front to fight for independence against the French. The spirit of this unity was evident in a letter published in 1945 by Vietnamese Catholic Bishops to the Christian world calling for their support in the Vietnamese people's effort to preserve independence from France.<sup>42</sup> Collaboration between the Catholic Church and the Communist-led Viet Minh anti-French forces culminated in early 1950 with the establishment in North Vietnam of a United Catholics Committee designed to bring together priest and lay Catholics to work with Ho Chi Minh's liberation movement against France.<sup>43</sup>

Shortly after the formation of the committee, however, the relationship between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and communist-led liberation forces turned antagonistic. This occurred for two main reasons. First, beginning in 1950, the intentions of the Communist-led Viet Minh became clear to the Catholics. The Viet Minh intended to introduce Communism as a state ideology and soul-guiding force in society. The Viet Minh began to consolidate power and establish undisputed domination by eliminating all other non-communist resistance forces—including the Catholic-led groups. The common ground of nationalism crumbled as the Viet Minh began to establish socialist societies

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<sup>40</sup> A good example of this can be seen in the ministry of the Vicar Apostolic of West Tonkin, Paul Puginier, who stated in the 1870s, "there are good reasons to hope that within thirty years, virtually all of Tonkin will be Christian, that is to say French." For more details see Jean Michaud, "French Missionary Expansion in Colonial Upper Tonkin," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (June 2004): 293-297.

<sup>41</sup> Gheddo, 24.

<sup>42</sup> George Evers, "Human Rights in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam—Religious Freedom," Pontifical Mission Society: Human Rights Office [report on-line] <<http://www.mission-aachen.de/humanrights>>; accessed on 5 November 2004, page 8.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

and communist governments in Viet Minh controlled areas. The second main reason was Pope Pius XII. With the threat of Communist domination in Eastern Europe, Pope Pius XII led the Church against “atheistic Communism” and pursued a policy of zero compromise or appeasement with Communists.<sup>44</sup> The Pope’s animosity towards Communism culminated in a 1949-decree in which he forbade Catholics in all countries to vote for Communist parties or cooperate with them in any way. The consequence for violating this decree was excommunication.<sup>45</sup> In response to the Pope’s position on Communism, in 1951, Vietnamese bishops published a letter warning their flock about “atheistic Communism.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the letter directly forbade all Vietnamese Catholics from either joining or cooperating with communist organizations.<sup>47</sup>

Particularly for Catholics in the north, Communism became the greater of two evils; French colonization being the other. Two of the largest dioceses in Hanoi organized political associations with militias that actively fought against the Communists until 1954. Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi of Bui Chu Diocese formed an armed organization to fight against both the French and the Communists.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, the communist-led Viet Minh forces defeated the French. The Geneva Conference in 1954 secured Vietnam’s independence from France, but also left the nation split at the seventeenth parallel: the communist-led Democratic Republic in the North and the American-backed Republic of Vietnam in the South. The establishment of a communist government in the north led to an exodus of northern Catholics to the South. Ten of the twelve Vietnamese bishops, seven hundred priests, and close to 700,000 Catholics moved from the North to the South.<sup>49</sup> The 300,000 Catholics who stayed

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Cheetham, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the Popes from St. Peter to John Paul II* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1983), 290.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Gheddo, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Mais, “A Captive Church: Catholicism and Repression in Vietnam,” *Indochina Report* 16 (Jul-Sep 1988): 6.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Denney, “The Catholic Church in Vietnam,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 271.

<sup>49</sup> Am Nguyen, “The Role of the Laity in the Development and Expansion of the Church in Vietnam Under the Communist Regime from 1975 to 1989” (Masters thesis, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, 1998), 36.

behind faced persecution, repression, and government control of their church and religion.<sup>50</sup>

The newly established Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) viewed the Catholic Church with great suspect and distrust. The Catholic Church was highly organized, hieratical, and had an agenda anathematic from the Communist party.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the Catholic Church had indirect ties to the former imperialist power. The Communist party viewed Catholicism as a threat and harmful to their efforts to build their one-party socialist state.<sup>52</sup>

In June 1955, the DRV issued a decree on religion which gave “freedom of religion” premised upon many restrictions. For example, the decree stated:

Every citizen is granted religious freedom. Nobody has the right to infringe on this freedom. Every citizen has the right to profess and propagate any religion he wishes, provided such religion is not detrimental to the independence, national freedom, social order and laws of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>53</sup>

The broad language of this decree essentially gave the DRV government the ability to restrict and control a religion if it did not support the DRV’s agenda. Article 14 of the decree elucidates the DRV’s method of co-opting religion. It discusses the role and responsibility religion and religious institutions have to support the state. Article 14 states, “When worshipping ministers of the religion preach, they are obliged to inspire in the faithful a sense of patriotism, an awareness of their civic duties and respect for the democratic authorities and the laws of the People’s Republic.”<sup>54</sup>

Shortly after the DRV’s decree on religion was issued, the DRV formed the Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peace-loving Catholics. This organization was designed to propagate the official government policy towards Catholics and mobilize

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<sup>50</sup> Evers, 10.

<sup>51</sup> A communist party has existed continuously in Vietnam since 1930. However, it has gone by three different names at different times. The communist party in Vietnam was originally established as the Indochinese Communist Party (1930-1951). It then changed its name to the Vietnam’s Worker’s Party (1951-1976). Finally in 1976 with the formal reunification of north and south Vietnam, the party took on its present name, the Vietnamese Communist Party. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, I shall refer to the communist party in Vietnam through out the thesis as the Vietnamese Communist Party.

<sup>52</sup> Gheddo, 78.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Evers, 10.

Catholics to support the new regime.<sup>55</sup> In addition to trying to control and co-opt the Church's agenda and doctrine to suit the Party's ideology and agenda, the DRV also attempted to break the Church off from the Vatican. Bishops and priests were prevented from sending or receiving letters directly to and from the Vatican.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the DRV confiscated all Church property, banned religious press, and nationalized all Catholic elementary and secondary schools.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the DRV took control of seminaries and Catholic schools by declaring only Marxist ideology was allowed to be taught. This prevented the Catholics in the North from attending seminary and replenishing priests.

The pattern of repression, persecution, and co-optation experienced by the Catholic Church in the North after 1954 established the basic pattern followed by the VCP against the Catholic Church in the South after 1975. However, before 1975, the Catholic Church fared much better in the newly established Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in the South.<sup>58</sup>

South Vietnamese Catholics maintained strong ties to the Vatican. Vietnamese Bishops from the RVN played an active role in the historic Vatican II Council.<sup>59</sup> Beginning with the Republic of Vietnam's first president, Ngo Dinh Diem—a staunch Catholic—Catholics played a disproportionately large role in the RVN's government and military. For example, in 1960, 66 percent of the senators, 30 percent of the Members of Parliament, 21 percent of the high ranking military officers, and all key cabinet positions were Catholics.<sup>60</sup> Catholics only consisted of 7 percent of the total population of the South. Up until the communist victory over the South in 1975, Catholics continued to take an active part in politics and social issues in the RVN.

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<sup>55</sup> Denney, 272.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>57</sup> Evers, 11.

<sup>58</sup> The Republic of Vietnam existed from 22 October 1955 to 30 April 1975.

<sup>59</sup> The Vatican II Council was held at the Vatican from 1962 to 1965. The Council brought about important reforms to the Catholic Church, making the Church less esoteric by adapting the Church to individual cultures while maintaining doctrinal integrity.

<sup>60</sup> Evers, 12.

The above historical overview of the Catholic Church in Vietnam until 1975 elucidates three critical factors which create the context for interpreting the Vietnamese during the periods of autarky and complex interdependence.

1) Both past and contemporary Vietnamese rulers have been wary of the Church's ability to establish an independent agenda, expose social cleavages, and serve as a means to mobilize regime dissent.

2) The VCP's suspicion and mistrust of the Catholic Church was founded in the activity of some early French Catholic missionaries who aided and abetted French colonization efforts of Vietnam. The VCP's suspicion and mistrust heightened after independence in 1954 after 700,000 Catholics in the north fled to the south rather than live under Communism. The VCP was also suspicious of the Catholic Church due to the high percentage of Catholics in the RVN's government and military.

3) Finally, the nature and structure of the Catholic Church placed it at odds with communism. The Church was highly organized and hierarchal. At the top of a centralized structure sat a foreign leader, the Pope, who was openly anti-communist before the Vatican II Council.

These factors have coalesced to make the VCP highly suspicious of the Catholic Church. The next section provides an overview of the VCP's view of religion and religious institutions at the time of reunification in 1975.

## B. RELIGION, RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITY

On 30 April 1975, the southern Republic of Vietnam officially capitulated to the northern communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This marked the culmination of thirty years of war—first to achieve independence in 1954 and then to achieve reunification in 1975. The VCP's process of reunification and integration of the southern Vietnamese economy and society into the socialist system of the north would face many obstacles and much opposition. Religion was one such potential obstacle anticipated by the VCP.

There are three levels of fundamental conflict between the VCP and religious groups. The first level of conflict is in the inherently anathematic natures of communism and religion: Communism is an atheistic ideology; religion by its very nature goes against

the tenets of Communism.<sup>61</sup> Marx described religion as an “intoxicant which makes [people] slaves of capital” and makes people “lose all their human dignity.”<sup>62</sup> According to Marxist ideology, religion was simply a tool used to exploit the working classes. To an adherent of religion, however, religion represented a profound personal faith, a guide to a better earthly life, and a hope for the life to come. To embrace an ideology which discounts and attempts to invalidate one’s personal faith, belief system, and source of hope, would be inherently problematic.

The second level of conflict lies between the mono-organizational structure of the VCP and the relative organizational autonomy of religious groups. As mentioned in chapter one, the VCP in Vietnam follows a mono-organizational structure. The 1980 Socialist Republic of Vietnam Constitution made the VCP the “sole force leading the state and society.”<sup>63</sup> The dominating role of the VCP in Vietnamese life was described in party training manuals as including “all aspects of life in all domains—political, military, economic, social, cultural, and the material and spiritual life of the people.”<sup>64</sup> Through the party, the government sought to control all aspects of society in its effort to build a classless society and ultimately a workers utopia. To do this, the VCP could not have any competing organizations. Other organizations posed a direct threat to the VCP’s mono-organizational structure: religions have an established structure of authority, a nationwide network reaching the grass roots level, loyal congregations and adherents, and the resources and ability to mobilize society.<sup>65</sup>

The last fundamental level of conflict between the VCP and religious groups is an extension of the second conflict: the VCP views itself as the sole representative of liberation, nationalism, and sovereignty. To ensure its dominance, the VCP controlled every aspect of Vietnamese society by bringing all organizations into the Party structure and co-opting their agendas. The Party strove to control or co-opt all aspects of Vietnamese society such that every person and organization worked towards centralized

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<sup>61</sup> Malarney, “Return to the Past,” 227.

<sup>62</sup> Mais, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Porter, 65.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Abuza, 185.



goals under Party leadership and guidance.<sup>66</sup> The Third Party Congress in September 1960 summed up the Party's position on this. Its report stated, "Marxism-Leninism must absolutely dominate the moral life of the country, become the ideology of all the people, be the basis of which to build a new morality."<sup>67</sup> The Party saw religious groups as a likely challenge to its agenda and a potential threat to Party domination. In particular, religious groups threatened the Party's dominant ideology by diverting loyalties of adherents to an authority beyond the state: to an amorphous deity, an independent ideology or dogma, or a foreign religious leader such as the Pope.

Thus the conflicts between religion and the VCP extended beyond a fight between atheism and belief; it was also a conflict over legitimacy. If religious groups were successful in providing for the spiritual and social needs of their members then the VCP would lose legitimacy. Thus the Party rigidly controlled and co-opted religion. However, before the specific policies and practices used by the state to control and co-opt the Catholic Church from 1975 to present and their effectiveness against the Catholic Church can be discussed, it is necessary first to provide a background and context for Vietnam's position vis-à-vis the international community. The next two sections examine how Vietnam moved from a position of relative autarky (1975 – 1986) to one of global integration (1987 to 2004).

### C. FROM AUTARKY TO DOI MOI: 1975 TO 1986

In this section Vietnam's state of autarky is developed by examining Vietnam's diplomatic and foreign relations, its economy, and its societal integration. Study of these three areas clearly shows that Vietnam was in a state of autarky from 1975 through the end of 1986.

#### 1. Diplomatic and Foreign Relations

The capitulation of the RVN government in the south to the North Vietnamese forces on 30 April 1975 marked the culmination of the Communists' 30-year effort to

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<sup>66</sup> William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 102.

<sup>67</sup> Passed at the Third Party Congress in resolution, 1960. Cited in Nguyen Van Canh, 165.

liberate and unify their nation. Official reunification came on July 2, 1976 with the creation of the VCP-led Socialist Republic of Vietnam.<sup>68</sup>

International factors from 1975 to 1986 exacerbated already difficult economic and social conditions in Vietnam. In December 1978 after Cambodian incursions into Vietnamese territory, Vietnam attacked Cambodia to protect its territorial integrity.<sup>69</sup> Vietnam's subsequent 13-year occupation of Cambodia placed enormous strains on Vietnam's struggling economy and its foreign relations. In response to Vietnam's attack and occupation of Cambodia, the United States led an international economic embargo against Vietnam. Vietnam's invasion into Cambodia led to a complete breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese relations and a short but costly month-long Chinese punitive invasion into Vietnam in February 1979. To man the extended military campaign in Cambodia and fend off the Chinese invasion, Vietnam diverted huge investment resources to finance a major military buildup in 1978. Vietnam's armed forces grew from 770,000 to 1.5 million.<sup>70</sup> David Marr argues that this diversion of financial resources during the military buildup was so large that the second five-year plan had essentially become irreverent and by 1979 it was quietly set aside.<sup>71</sup>

Another serious consequence of the breakdown of relations with China was the loss of approximately U.S. \$600 million in Chinese aid for Vietnam's Second Five-Year plan.<sup>72</sup> By the end of the 1970s, Vietnam's only international allies were the Soviet Union and the other COMECON member states. As for regional or international economic or diplomatic relations, Vietnam was isolated by its actions in Cambodia and its residence in the Soviet Union's camp in the bi-polar Cold War.

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<sup>68</sup> During the Fourth National Congress, December 1976, the Vietnamese Communist Party was created combining the Vietnamese Workers Party in the North and members of the National Liberation Front in the South.

<sup>69</sup>For two excellent accounts of Cambodia's incursions into Vietnam and acquisition of Vietnamese territory see Nayan Chandra, *Brother enemy: The War After the War* (New York: Collier Books, 1986), 33; and Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1992), 78-79.

<sup>70</sup> Tetsaburo Kimura, "Vietnam—Ten Years of Economic Struggle," *Asian Survey* 26 (October 1986), 1,051.

<sup>71</sup> David Marr, "Vietnam's Economic Situation," *Vietnam Today*, no. 39 (November 1986), 3-5.

<sup>72</sup> D. R. SarDesai, *Vietnam: Past and Present* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1998) 98-99.

## 2. Economy

The decade following reunification in 1975 was a disaster for Vietnam. The Second Five-Year plan (1976-1980) was an ambitious plan to leap forward in agriculture and light industry, and to complete the socialist transformation of the South.<sup>73</sup> To achieve a lead forward in agricultural production, the VCP instituted a wide-spread agriculture collectivization plan in the south. The radical agriculture collectivization plan and rush to impose the North's socialist planned economy on the south after reunification failed dismally. Agricultural production plummeted as peasants lost incentive to work and harvest. By 1980, 10,000 of the 13,246 established agricultural collectives had collapsed.<sup>74</sup> The output in state controlled industries actually decreased by 6.5 percent during this period.<sup>75</sup> The state only produced 14.4M tons of food, over 6M tons short of its 21M ton goal.<sup>76</sup> The mismanagement of agriculture resources led to food shortages and wide-spread hunger.

Vietnam also suffered economically and monetarily during this period. Between 1976 and 1980, the purchasing power of state employees declined by 48 percent.<sup>77</sup> During this same period national income grew at an average annual rate of only 0.4 percent.<sup>78</sup> A French reporter painted a grim picture of Hanoi in a 1980 dispatch from Vietnam:

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<sup>73</sup> Vo Nhan Tri, *Party Policies and Economic Performance: The Second and Third Five-Year Plans Examined*, in "Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development," eds., David G. Marr and Christine P. White (Cornell University: Southeast Asia Program, 1988), 78.

<sup>74</sup> Vo, 79.

<sup>75</sup> Porter, 50.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Tran van Tho et al. *Kinh te Viet Nam 1955-2000 [Vietnamese Economy 1955-2000]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat ban Thong Ke, 2000), 242. As cited in Hy V. Luong, *Postwar Vietnamese Society: An Overview of Transformational Dynamics*, in "Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society" ed. Hy V. Luong (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003), 8.

<sup>78</sup> Porter, 50.

The Vietnamese of 1980 are more destitute than the Vietnamese of 1976. Poverty is profound and harrowing. People live above the bearable physiological threshold, but only just. Many wage-earners are compelled to be cunning in order to survive. Shortages lead to the persistence of illicit trading and corruption.<sup>79</sup>

The Third-Five Year Plan (1981-1985), despite the best of intentions, only caused Vietnam's economic situation to worsen. The plan called for more technological development, centralized planning, and incredulously, a completion of the failed socialist "transformation of agriculture" in the south.<sup>80</sup> Mismanagement during this period led many state-run industries to operate at a loss. This combined with severe shortages of basic necessities and huge national budget deficits led to hyperinflation. During the 1981-1985 period the average rise in national income was only 6.4 percent annually compared to a staggering 83.7 percent average annual increase in the money supply volume.<sup>81</sup> Vietnam weakly attempted to address the inflation problem by implementing an across-the-board currency change in 1985. This did nothing to stop the inflation and only exacerbated the already desperate economic situation of the Vietnamese populace. By 1987, the annual inflation rate in Vietnam was estimated to be between 700 and 1000 percent.<sup>82</sup>

### 3. Society and Social Integration

Discussing post-1975 Vietnam, Gabriel Kolko stated, "The fundamental dilemma facing all revolutionaries is that their talent to seize power is quite unrelated to the skills essential for administering and holding it."<sup>83</sup> Kolko argued that the VCP were able to win the war but they could not win the peace.<sup>84</sup> Former National Liberation Front Minister of Justice, Truong Nhu Tang, summed up much of the frustration held by the

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<sup>79</sup> Vo, 82.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>81</sup> Porter, 53.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Kolko, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Kolko's main argument is essentially the VCP was well-suited to lead their nation to reunification; however, after reunification it could not effectively govern and bring about the harmonious peace and prosperity that it fought so hard for. The VCP did not shift its mindset from a war-time setting to a peace setting.

southerners over the failures of societal and social integration during the period after reunification. He stated, "Instead of national reconciliation and independence, Ho Chi Minh's successors have given us a country devouring its own and beholden once again to foreigners [Soviet advisors]." <sup>85</sup> Truong spoke of a widespread problem felt by many in the South: treatment as second-class citizens by northerners. Rather than incorporate the former south with open arms, the northern VCP treated the southerners as a conquered people. The poor treatment of the Southerners did anything but endear their new communist-led government to them. Feelings of frustration and despair with the VCP's monopolizing societal leadership were exacerbated by the hunger and poverty caused by collectivization and VCP-led centralized economic planning.

By 1986 Vietnam was stuck in a domestic socio-economic crisis and foreign policy crag mire. The VCP's foreign policy debacles, failed economic policies, and dismal social integration pushed communism as an ideology to the brink of bankruptcy. <sup>86</sup> The VCP could no longer rely on "we won the war" for legitimacy. The Party realized poverty and hunger would cause people to question the leading position of the Party in Vietnam. To survive politically, the VCP hierarchy recognized the need to reform. The party realized it had to find new means of legitimacy, this time based on satisfying the material needs of its people. Consequently, the commanding echelons of the party reached agreement to ease its ideology in favor of more pragmatic policies of economic development and (perceived) national interests. They changed from a foreign and domestic policy dominated by ideology to one based on national interest and focused on economic growth. <sup>87</sup>

#### D. FROM DOI MOI TO COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE: 1987 TO PRESENT

During the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986, the VCP approved the policy of *Doi Moi* (Renovation). *Doi Moi* strove to move Vietnam toward economic openness

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<sup>85</sup> Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 310.

<sup>86</sup> Kamm, 145-162.

<sup>87</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution," in *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition*, eds. Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 18 -20.

and administrative decentralization. By 1987, centralized planning was abandoned and the private sector was formally recognized. As a result of these changes, Vietnam attracted and secured foreign investment from Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) countries, Europe, and the United States. Vietnam's change in economic outlook and engagement of international capital and trade led to a shift in Vietnam's position vis-à-vis the international community: shifting from a position of autarchy to a position of complex interdependence. This shift was evident in Vietnam in three areas: foreign relations, the economy, and societal integration.

#### 1. Diplomatic and Foreign Relations

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Vietnam's ally and ideological mentor, the USSR, began pressuring Vietnam to reform and follow the Soviet Union's example in implementing glasnost and perestroika. The Soviet Union's Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev's new thinking in international relations had a profound impact on the VCP's hierarchy.<sup>88</sup> Gorbachev pressured Vietnam to end its military involvement in Cambodia and normalize relations with China. He also encouraged Vietnam to adapt and work with the new world, not against it.

This external pressure from the USSR combined with Vietnam's need to court foreign investment led to a strategic readjustment of Vietnam's national security policy.<sup>89</sup> The VCP decided to withdraw troops from Cambodia in 1987.<sup>90</sup> Vietnam changed its security doctrine from an offensive forward-deployed military to an inward-looking defensive military.<sup>91</sup>

This policy shift allowed Vietnam to initiate rapprochement with ASEAN member states. In 1988 Vietnam's Secretary-General Nguyen Van Linh first articulated that Vietnam was "eager to join ASEAN."<sup>92</sup> Carlyle Thayer has argued that Vietnam would gain three major benefits by joining ASEAN: 1) amicable relations with regional

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<sup>88</sup> Amer, 217.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Vietnam completed its troop withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989.

<sup>91</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, *Beyond Indochina: Indochina's Transition from Socialist Central Planning to Market-Oriented Economics and its Integration into South-east Asia*, "ADELPH," paper 297, International Institute of Strategic Studies (Oxford University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>92</sup> Thayer, *Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution*, 3

states, 2) foreign investment, and 3) a catalyst in domestic economic reform. A transformation in Vietnam's political relations would lead to a transformation in Vietnam's economic relations, which in turn would help the domestic policy of *Doi Moi*.<sup>93</sup>

The Seventh Party Congress in 1991 officially enunciated Vietnam's new orientation in foreign policy. The party congress report stated: "Vietnam wishes to be a friend of all countries in the world community striving for peace, independence, and development."<sup>94</sup> In 1989 Vietnam had diplomatic relation with only 23 nations; by 1996, it had established diplomatic relations with 163 nations.<sup>95</sup> This dramatic increase in diplomatic relations in such a short period of time is strong indicator of Vietnam's increasing openness to the international system.

In 1995, Vietnam became a member of ASEAN. Since then, Vietnam has been an active ASEAN member, working to promote economic prosperity, peace, and consensus building among Southeast Asian nations. In the early 1990s, Vietnam began an earnest rapprochement with its former enemy, the United States. This was critical to Vietnam's continued economic development. In 1993 the United States gave its support for international financial organizations to resume assistance to Vietnam. In July of the same year, President Clinton paved the way for the resumption of international lending from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to Vietnam. The U.S. trade embargo against Vietnam ended in February 1994. Official diplomatic relations were reestablished with the United States in July 1995.

In December 2001, a Bilateral Trade Agreement between the United States and Vietnam was ratified. Trade between Vietnam and the United States has grown rapidly since then. Vietnam's exports to the United States have jumped 90 percent from 2002 to 2003. At the end of 2003, exports to the United States were \$4.6 billion.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile,

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<sup>93</sup> Thayer, *Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution*, 6.

<sup>94</sup> Bui Thanh Son, *Vietnam-U.S. Relations and Vietnam's Foreign Policy in the 1990s*, in "Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition," eds. Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 203.

<sup>95</sup> Thayer, *Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> U.S. Vietnam Trade Council, "U.S. Total Exports and Imports to and from Vietnam," [home page on-line]; available from <http://www.usvtc.org/Trade%20Statistics/im-ex.htm>; Internet; accessed 19 August 2004.

the U.S. became Vietnam's largest export market, accounting for an estimated 70 percent of all Vietnamese exports.<sup>97</sup> In 2001, Vietnam and the United States signed a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). In order to establish the BTA, Vietnam had to follow specific regulations and rules for banking, customs fees, publication of laws and regulations, and tariffs on certain goods and services.

The establishment of a foreign policy of friendship and engagement, especially concerning the United States, is evidence of Vietnam's commitment to market reforms and ascendance of national interests over antiquated Marxist-Leninist ideology.

## 2. Economy

The effects of *Doi Moi* upon Vietnam are clear. *Doi Moi* has fostered a burgeoning market economy and has moved Vietnam into the global order. First of all, *Doi Moi* began by reducing the role of central economic planning. The government cut back on state subsidies, allowing for market forces to take hold. The government also introduced what Carlyle Thayer call, "socialist legality" or a nascent form of the rule of law.<sup>98</sup> This played out as the government began codifying trade and finance laws. These new trade and finance laws helped facilitate international trade and commerce.

In 1990, four years after *Doi Moi* was implemented, Vietnam's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was U.S. \$114. During the 1990s Vietnam's economy grew at an average rate of 7.5 percent. At the end of the decade in the year 2000, Vietnam's GDP per capita had risen to U.S. \$397.<sup>99</sup> Today Vietnam has the second fastest growing economy in Asia after China.<sup>100</sup>

The growth in Vietnam's economy has been fuelled by Vietnam's integration into the global market and community. Most importantly, this growth has come through foreign direct investment (FDI) and increased international trade. Economic relations

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<sup>97</sup> Alan Boyd, "Fight looms over U.S. curbs on aid to Vietnam," Asia Times, 24 July 2004, as found in U.S. Vietnam Trade Council [home page on-line]; available from <http://www.usvtc.org/Fights%20looms%20over%20US%20curbs%20on%20aid%20to%20Vietnam.htm>; Internet; accessed 19 August 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Thayer, 113.

<sup>99</sup> 1990 was the first year GDP per capita was measured in Vietnam. Hy V. Luong, *Postwar Vietnamese Society: An Overview of Transformational Dynamics*, in "Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society" ed. Hy V. Luong (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003), 1.

<sup>100</sup> Regina M. Abrami, "Vietnam in 2002: On the Road to Recovery," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (January/February 2003): 92.



with the United States provided a big “carrot” to leverage further reform and liberalization in Vietnam. Securing a BTA with the United States was just a taste of the benefits membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) would bring to Vietnam. Joining the WTO is presently Vietnam’s top economic goal. Vietnam’s Trade Vice-Minister Luong Van Tu has emphatically stated that Vietnam wants to join the WTO “as soon as possible.”<sup>101</sup> Membership in the WTO will give Vietnam significantly increased access to the markets of the WTO’s 147 members. Vietnamese leaders deem this access key to Vietnam’s continued economic development and, indirectly, to Party legitimacy.

Vietnam first applied for WTO membership in 1995 but did not begin negotiations until 2002. To join the WTO Vietnam has been required to liberalize its market access and meet international standards on investment, trade, and financial transparency. This process has been slow and has met resistance from Party hardliners hesitant to veer so far from ideology. Nevertheless, Party reformers have continued to push Vietnam’s bid for membership forward. Most likely, Vietnam’s entry will be delayed until the end of 2005 due to its slow legal and market reforms. The potential of the textile and garment industry is a key factor motivating Vietnam to work out the final reforms required to accede to the WTO by the end of 2005. This industry is Vietnam’s second largest export sector, but is currently subject to quotas. However, the textile and garments quota system for WTO members will end in 2005.<sup>102</sup>

Vietnam’s strong desire to expedite reforms in order to ensure WTO membership by the end of 2005 gives international proponents of reform and liberalization much leverage. As seen through the textile and garment industry example, Vietnam’s economy is becoming more and more tied to the interworkings of foreign forces. Vietnam’s economic and political integration has brought Vietnam out of autarchy and into a state moving towards complex interdependence with the international community. Aside from giving external forces leverage to encourage reform in Vietnam, Vietnam’s integration

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<sup>101</sup> WTO News: 2004 News Items, “Members Praise Vietnam’s New Offers, but seek improvements and more clarification,” World Trade Organization [home page on-line]; available from [http://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/news04\\_e/acc\\_vietnam\\_15\\_june04\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news04_e/acc_vietnam_15_june04_e.htm); Internet; Accessed 19 August 2004.

<sup>102</sup> Channel News Asia, “U.S. Trade Official Supports Vietnam’s WTO Bid, 25 July 2004,” U.S. Vietnam Trade Council [home page on-line]; Available from <http://www.usvtc.org/News/July%202004/US20Trade%20Official%20Supports%20Vietnam.htm>; Internet; Accessed 19 August 2004.

into globalization has also allowed internal forces to place pressure on the Party to reform and liberalize.

### 3. Society and Social Integration

Vietnam's economic liberalization under the *Doi Moi* reforms suffered a brief period of retrenchment in reaction to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, and later to the Asian economic crisis in 1997.<sup>103</sup> The VCP attributed the collapse of the Soviet Union to the communist leadership losing control of the system through recklessly undertaking economic reforms without assuring the political stability of communism.<sup>104</sup> The VCP viewed national security as analogous to maintaining the Party's absolute power in order to guarantee the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam.<sup>105</sup> The Soviet Union veered from this and consequently imploded into chaos. The VCP did not want economic liberalization to lead to an implosion in Vietnam as it had in the Soviet Union.

By the end of 1991, the VCP viewed the threat of "peaceful evolution" as one of Vietnam's largest threats.<sup>106</sup> Peaceful evolution was the notion held by many senior VCP leaders that unwelcome democratic reforms and influences would attend the new economic policies, expanded foreign relations, and international integration. Party hardliners saw reforms and international integration as a means to exacerbate political instability in Vietnam, leading to the erosion of one-party rule.<sup>107</sup> In spite of these fears of peaceful evolution, the VCP felt it must press ahead with increased VCP-led reform to achieve economic growth through increased foreign direct investment. To maintain legitimacy, the VCP must lead continue to lead the country in the direction of economic prosperity.

The tremendous growth in technological advancements during the past 15 to 20 years has had a great effect both directly and indirectly on the development of internal

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<sup>103</sup> Kolko 1997, 29-30, 133-137; Kerkvliet, "An Approach for Analyzing State-Society Relations," 243.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew F. Pierre, "Vietnam's Contradictions," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (2000): 75.

<sup>105</sup> Thayer, *Beyond Indochina: Indochina's Transition from Socialist Central Planning to Market-Oriented Economics and its Integration into South-east Asia* Beyond Indochina, 22.

<sup>106</sup> Carlyle E. Thayer, *The Vietnamese People's Army Under Doi Moi*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994), 43-44.

<sup>107</sup> Thayer, *Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution*, 18.

forces within Vietnam capable of leveraging pressure against the Party to reform and liberalize. David Marr points out that access to global media in Vietnam is diminishing the state's capacity to control information. Marr argues that the Vietnamese are finding ways to pursue their own agendas and circumvent the state-owned media through previously unprecedented access to overseas sources.<sup>108</sup>

One of the largest sources of foreign information, and the most difficult to control, is the internet. The internet first became publicly available in Vietnam in 1998. At that time there were just 3,000 subscribers.<sup>109</sup> Since then, the number of internet subscribers and users has grown exponentially. By June 2003, there were an estimated 465,000 internet subscribers in Vietnam and 1.9 million internet users.<sup>110</sup> In the year 2000, there were 60,000 Vietnamese web sites linked to the five state-owned Internet Service Providers and in the year 2001, there were 205,000 sites.<sup>111</sup> The availability and use of the internet is clearly taking off.

The internet potentially provides unlimited access to all sorts of information. The government has created firewalls in an attempt to block all anti-party sites and is attempting to catch all activity on the internet which it deems undermines the Party.

But for the VCP, the imposition of foreign and potentially anti-party ideas is not the real threat; the real threat comes in the internet's innate ability to network people together allowing them to become part of transnational organizations and causes. The internet in Vietnam is creating new transnational domains.<sup>112</sup>

The technological revolution in information and communications, particularly as manifested in the internet, has gone hand and hand with globalization in diffusing "power away from governments and empowering individuals."<sup>113</sup> The effects of globalization

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<sup>108</sup> David G. Marr, *A Passion for Modernity: Intellectuals and the Media*, in "Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society" ed. Hy V. Luong (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003), 290-291.

<sup>109</sup> Robin van Koert, "The Internet in Vietnam: Party Propaganda or infotainment?" in *Asian Cyberactivism: Freedom of Expression and Media Censorship*, eds. Steven Gan, James Gomez, and Uwe Johannsen (Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2004), 200.

<sup>110</sup> Koert, 218-219.

<sup>111</sup> Marr, 292-293.

<sup>112</sup> Nye, 75.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, X.

have allowed technology to spread, empowering less powerful actors in the international ring.<sup>114</sup> One manifestation of these previously less powerful actors in transnational actors. Today transnational actors are found in numerous foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Vietnam. By the end of 2004 there were approximately 500 foreign NGOs registered and operating in Vietnam.<sup>115</sup> These transnational actors are then networked throughout the world via technology creating transnational networks. These networks affect economic, technological, health, educational, social, and religious issues. Through the development of technology and globalization, “actors other than states participate in world politics.”<sup>116</sup> As Vietnam becomes more intertwined in the world, transnational networks have greater leverage and effectiveness in influencing state policy.<sup>117</sup>

#### E. CONCLUSION

This chapter has established the historical, political, and geopolitical context against to examine how Vietnam’s degree of integration in the international community affects its view and treatment of the Catholic Church. The early history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam until 1975 give historical reasons for the VCP’s mistrust and suspicion of the Catholic Church and religion in general. The Church’s ability to establish an independent agenda and mobilize society, along with its ideological differences with communism, coalesced to make the VCP want to ensure it controls and co-opts the Church and by so doing minimizes the potential threat. In a broader context, there are fundamental conflicts between religious groups and the VCP at three levels: 1) ideology; 2) structure; and 3) social perception. Finally, the chapter examined

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 98. See also Michael Haas, “Internal Security, Democratization, and Globalization in Southeast Asia,” in *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition*, [on-line]; Available from <http://www.apcss.org/Publications/SAS/SASAPResponse030320/Regionalfinal.htm>; Internet; Accessed 15 September 2004.

<sup>115</sup> Committee for NGO affairs, VUFO and PACCOM, viewed at [http://www.ngocentre.netnam.vn/ngores\\_E/intro001.htm](http://www.ngocentre.netnam.vn/ngores_E/intro001.htm)

<sup>116</sup> Keohane and Nye, 24.

<sup>117</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics: Introduction’, in *Essential Readings in World Politics*, eds. Karen Mingst and Jack Snyder (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 336 – 338.

Vietnam's diplomatic and foreign relations, economics, and society during Vietnam's period of autarky and the extent of its global integration.

The VCP has obvious historical reasons to distrust and suspect the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the VCP has inherent conflicts with religion which would intuitively lead the VCP to seek to control and co-opt religion to prevent a religious group from weakening the VCP's position or becoming too a strong competitor to the Party's lead role of building and guiding the nation and society. During Vietnam's period of autarky, 1975 to 1986, the VCP suppressed, controlled, and co-opted the Catholic Church. Due to Vietnam's isolation, the VCP had no reason to grant concessions to the Church. By 1986 the VCP clearly saw its socialist policies failing and itself losing legitimacy. To counter this negative trend the Party launched the *Doi Moi* reforms. *Doi Moi* led to Vietnam's emergence from autarky to embrace the global community as it strove to develop economically and embrace the international community. As Vietnam embraced globalization it was exposed to new forces, interests, and technologies. This exposure has pressured the VCP to allow greater religious freedom. The next two chapters show how the Catholic Church in Vietnam has enjoyed greater religious freedom in the conditions of complex interdependence than under the conditions of autarky.

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### III. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM, 1975 – 1987

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has gone through many seasons: organization, persecution, and expansion. I propose that the Catholic Church in Vietnam entered a new season after the reunification of Vietnam by Communist forces on 30 April 1975.<sup>118</sup> Reunification and the ascendancy of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) brought upon the Catholic Church a period of suppression and cooptation. This period first began in the North in 1954 with the establishment of the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Now controlling a unified government over all Vietnam, the VCP brought this new season of suppression and cooptation upon all Vietnamese Catholics: in the North and the South.

The Catholic Church in the South at reunification was a different church than in the North. A massive exodus of some 700,000 Catholics, twenty plus years of suppression and cooptation, and isolation from the Vatican left the Church in the North weak, politically submissive, and out of touch with mainstream Catholicism. In 1975 there were fewer than one million Catholics in the North and just fewer than 400 priests. In the South, there were nearly two million Catholics and 3,000 priests.<sup>119</sup> The Church in the South was numerically double the size of the North and while the Church in the North had one priest for ever 2,475 parishioners, the Church in the South had one priests for every 633 parishioners. The Catholic Church in the South had implemented liberalizing changes after the Vatican II Council.<sup>120</sup> These changes, such as reading mass in Vietnamese and liberalizing Catholic attitudes towards local customs such as bowing to the alters of ancestors, made the Catholic church in the South more adapted and suitable for Vietnamese society.<sup>121</sup> Compared to the Catholic Church in the North at

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<sup>118</sup> The official reunification took place on 2 July 1976 with the formation of a new state, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. For purposes of brevity and to avoid confusion, I will refer to 30 April 1975 as reunification; the day the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam from the north defeated the democratic Republic of Vietnam in the south and took control of the entire nation.

<sup>119</sup> "Vietnam – Catholicism" [on-line]; Available from <http://www.exploitx.com/Vietnam-Catholicism-cg.php>; Internet; Accessed 22 October 2004.

<sup>120</sup> The Vatican II Council was held at the Vatican from 1962 to 1965. Many Vietnamese bishops from the South played an active role at the council. No bishops from the North were allowed to travel to the Vatican to participate.

<sup>121</sup> Denney, 296.

reunification the Catholic Church in the South was more integrated into Vietnamese society and culture, and more politically active.

When the VCP began to integrate the South under the socialist model and rebuild the reunified country, the Catholic Church, in the South in particular, posed a potential threat and challenge to the legitimacy of the newly reunified Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Church was too large to be eradicated, yet too strong a social force to leave unchecked. According to socialist theory, religion should die out once a socialist society has been fully constructed.<sup>122</sup> Accordingly, if the VCP suppressed the Church's ability to challenge the VCP politically or socially, the Church should eventually die off of natural causes once the VCP had established a fully developed socialist society. Furthermore, the VCP could use religious groups to further the Party's own political and social ends by co-opting them to promote the government's socialist agenda. Thus, after the reunification of Vietnam, the VCP implemented a sustained policy of suppression and cooptation of religious groups.

Against this context, this chapter examines four aspects of the Catholic Church in Vietnam from 1975-1986. First it illustrates the initial impact of reunification on the Catholic Church. Next, the chapter elucidates how the state codified religious control and constitutional religious "freedom" to suppress and begin co-opting religion. The third section discusses the Catholic Church's efforts to survive during this period. Finally, the chapter will take an in-depth look at how the state was able to successfully co-opt the Church during this period.

#### A. INITIAL IMPACT OF REUNIFICATION ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Upon reunification of Vietnam the government's position towards religion and religious institutions was to eliminate them as social and spiritual guiding forces in the lives of Southern Vietnamese. According to the VCP, the Catholic Church's hierarchy had become "a force opposed to all movements for national liberation and social progress" and a "state within a state."<sup>123</sup> The new government, the Socialist Republic of

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<sup>122</sup> Evers, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Anh Phong, "Catholicism in Vietnam and Reintegration into the National Community," *Vietnam Courier*, Nov. 1977, 24.



Vietnam (SRV), sought to eliminate the Church as an autonomous force in the southern society and contain its future growth and influence.

Catholics were both fearful and anxious about what their fate would be under the new communist regime. An estimated 56,000 Catholics, including 400 priests and lay leaders, fled Vietnam shortly before the Communist took over the South in 1975.<sup>124</sup> The majority of the 1.9 million Catholics living in the South in 1975 had no choice but to stay and make the best of living under the new regime. The new Socialist Republic of Vietnam was keenly aware of the high percentage of Southern Catholics who had been active in the South's government and military. For example, in 1960, 66 percent of the Senators, 30 percent of the Members of Parliament, and 21 percent of the high ranking military officers were all Catholic.<sup>125</sup> The Communist also knew that upwards of 700,000 of the 1.9 million Catholics in the South had overtly expressed their animosity or unwillingness to support or live in a communist system by fleeing the North for the South in 1954. The Communist believed many Southern Catholics were anti-Communist and must be suppressed. It was time to draw the curtains on the Catholic Church's role as an active societal actor and force in the South. For this reason, the regime employed five specific yet at times overlapping and interconnected policies

1. Arrests and Re-education

One of the first steps taken against the Catholic Church by the new regime was to arrest Church members and priests deemed by the VCP to be a threat to the new regime. These individuals were arrested on spurious charges and sent to reeducation camps for indefinite periods of incarceration. The purpose of the reeducation camp was three fold: 1) take threats to the new regime out of society, 2) punish individuals, and 3) indoctrinate members of the Southern society so when released they would no longer be a threat to communist society or have reactionary tendencies.

The reeducation camps largely accomplished their purposes by breaking the spirits of their detainees. Approximately 70 priests who were chaplains in the Army of

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<sup>124</sup> "Vietnam – Catholicism" [on-line]; Available from <http://www.exploitiz.com/Vietnam-Catholicism-cg.php>; Internet; Accessed 22 October 2004.

<sup>125</sup> Evers, 12.

the Republic of Vietnam were sent to reeducation camps in 1975.<sup>126</sup> Between 1975 and 1977, an additional two to three hundred priests and lay religious persons were arrested, imprisoned, or sent to reeducation camps.<sup>127</sup> Under these circumstances priests were both prohibited and prevented from performing their religious duties. The VCP asserted that none of the arrests or prison sentences were instigated for religious reasons. Rather, the VCP maintained all were arrested and incarcerated for contravening state policy or for inciting civil unrest.<sup>128</sup>

In reality, most of those arrested and sent to reeducation camps were incarcerated because of their opposition to communism, their position in the former Republic of Vietnam's government or military, or their association with the United States during the war. The Communist used the charge that Catholics had "documented" their opposition to communism by fleeing from the North to the South in 1954. This sole rationale was provided for the incarceration of many priests.<sup>129</sup> In the case of the chaplains, the fact they were members of the former Army of the Republic of Vietnam was on its own sufficient grounds for arrests and reeducation.<sup>130</sup>

The initial arrests of Catholic priests and other lay Catholic leaders demonstrated the VCP's position of suppressing the Church and in particular suppressing any religious leader who posed even a potential threat to the new regime. Priests were arrested who were judged to have the capacity and inclination to lead opposition against the new developing communist government in Vietnam. The initial arrests took many priests out of the Catholic population and weakened the Catholic Church in Vietnam structurally.

## 2. Contact with the Vatican

Another immediate act by the government to weaken the Catholic Church in Vietnam was to cut off free contact between the Vatican and the Church in Vietnam. The VCP viewed the Vatican as an "organization of exploitation on a grand scale, which has always been tied to anti-revolutionary and anti-communist capitalism."<sup>131</sup> The Vatican

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<sup>126</sup> Fr. Sesto Quercetti, "The Vietnam Church: Conflict and Courage," *America* (18 September 1976):

<sup>127</sup> Denney, 280.

<sup>128</sup> Mais, 16.

<sup>129</sup> Evers, 14.

<sup>130</sup> See Quercetti and Denney, 280.

<sup>131</sup> Mais, 3.

had a long history of anti-communism. The VCP believed it would be best for the Catholics in the South to not have free contact with the Vatican while the South was being taken over and rebuilt by a communist led government. The Vatican might foster and/or fuel anti-communists resentment and notions of descent.

The government allowed minimal contact with the Vatican in the north only after years of isolation. The government only let the Church resume contact with Rome when they felt they had firm control of the Church in the north and when it was in their interests.<sup>132</sup> Priests and bishops in the South would have to go through a period of suppression and subservience to the Party just like the Catholics in the North did before the Party would let them resume contact with the Vatican.

### 3. Breakup of Church Social Linkages and Organizational Infrastructure in the South

The Catholic Church in the South at the time of reunification was well entrenched in southern society. Through elementary and secondary school, two universities, orphanages, hospitals, and numerous Catholic associations for people of all ages. The extent to which the Church was engrained in civil society and had the capacity to lead it posed a potential direct threat to the VCP's desire to hold a monopoly on the development and guidance of society in the South.

All educational and charitable work performed by the Catholic Church in the South stopped after the Communist take over. Catholic-run elementary schools, high schools, and two universities, student hostels, orphanages and hospitals were either expropriated or nationalized by the communists. The Catholics were not allowed to stay in charge of or run any of the schools or institutions. The Church also had a wide network of associations: the Assembly of Catholic Dioceses; the Catholic Mothers' Association; the Associations of the Virgin Mother's Children; and the *Thanh The* Youth Association. All of these associations and their activities were banned and dissolved from public activity.<sup>133</sup> This was done to take away the Catholic Church's influence in Vietnamese society.

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<sup>132</sup> Bishops from the north were first allowed to visit the Vatican in 1974. In May 1976, after reunification, Archbishop of Hanoi, Trinh Nhu Khue, was allowed to travel to the Vatican where he was consecrated the first Cardinal of Vietnam. See Denney, 277.

<sup>133</sup> Denney, 280.

#### 4. Control of the Internal Affairs

The state's position on controlling appointments to the priesthood was manifested shortly after reunification. At a meeting for Catholic clergy in August 1975 organized by the new regime, a Party official affirmed the Party's position. The official stated:

To place a bishop in the position of heading a diocese is not a matter related only to religion. To say that it is a matter of religion, means to separate Catholicism from the Nation. Each Vietnamese Christian family is a unit of the Vietnamese Society. Therefore, the appointment of a person to head a diocese must be approved by the revolutionary administration.<sup>134</sup>

The state sought to control the priesthood by overseeing ordination and appointments. According to VCP logic, overseeing who becomes the leader of an organization in society, in this case the Catholic Church, is clearly within the roles and scope of Party responsibility. After all, it is the VCP who has the primary responsibility to lead and guide Vietnamese society.

Another indirect way the VCP immediately began to control the Catholic priesthood was by closing all seminaries. In 1975 there were six major seminaries operating in South and none in the North. There were over 1000 seminarians studying to enter the priesthood.<sup>135</sup> After 1975, all six seminaries closed. The facilities of two of the oldest seminaries, Pontifical Institute of Dalat and the Vinh Long Seminary, were seized and expropriated for government use.<sup>136</sup> By 1986 there was only one seminary operating in all of Vietnam. It was in Hanoi and only had 16 seminaries enrolled. In 1987, the first seminary in the former South reopened. It had only 45 students.<sup>137</sup>

There are indications that the state, if not at the national level, certainly at the provincial level and below, followed a subtle plan intended to prevent Catholics from attending church and to distance them from the Church. More so in the country than in the cities, daily masses were prohibited on the notion that it hindered work

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<sup>134</sup> Nguyen Van Canh, 167.

<sup>135</sup> Mais, 11.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Denney, 292.

productivity.<sup>138</sup> Another subtle way of suppressing the ability to attend church was through the use of conflicting mandatory public events. Catholics often found themselves unable to attend special religious events and services because the local people's committee would organize a public meeting or some other event which required mandatory attendance.<sup>139</sup> These tactics were used to supplant the Church as the dominating social force in the lives of Vietnamese Catholics. The VCP wanted to establish a clear break between a Catholic's faith and his or her life. That is, faith and religion should be confined to the liturgy within church walls. All aspects of society belonged to the VCP.<sup>140</sup> The VCP wanted to isolate the Church from society.

#### 5. Crafting the Party's View of Catholicism

To strengthen the VCP's position as the rightful and legitimate leading force in Vietnam, the VCP actively disparaged the Catholic Church and negatively recast its history in popular literature, public school history texts, and other forms of popular media.

The VCP regarded Catholics as friends of the "reactionary forces of capitalism."<sup>141</sup> Numerous anti-religious texts were published after 1975 with this theme. Religion, the Catholic Church in particular, was portrayed as a force of "pretense, deception, and hypocrisy."<sup>142</sup> Catholic priests and lay persons were portrayed as unpatriotic collusionists who in reality feigned their religious convictions.

Another reason for rewriting Vietnamese history was to justify the economic success and relatively greater prosperity enjoyed by the much more developed South than under the communist led North. Numerous books and articles published between 1975 and 1981 portrayed the role of the Catholic Church in the former South as being a liaison between Catholics and foreign and anti-revolutionary forces. Special emphasis was placed on missionaries as preparing Vietnam for French colonization.<sup>143</sup> These writings and histories do not mention Catholicism in the context of faith. They only view the

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<sup>138</sup> Mais, 13.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Am Nguyen, 39.

<sup>141</sup> Evers, 13.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Mais, 5.

Catholic Church in political terms: its opposition towards the revolution and support of colonial and capitalist forces.

Anti-Catholicism was portrayed in both film and theater. A film entitled *Holy Day* depicted a Catholic priest who raped girls during confessionals. In a play performed by the Central Classical Drama Group, the plot again revolves around a priest who rapes parishioners. However, in this play, the priest is also an agent of the CIA and secretly goes around blowing up local public buildings.<sup>144</sup> The intent of such anti-Catholic media was to tarnish the reputation of the Church and boost the position of the VCP.<sup>145</sup>

The initial acts of suppression against the Catholic Church after reunification were designed to take away the Catholic Church's ability to guide and influence society. Catholic leaders, ordained and lay, were arrested and sent to reeducation camps. This removed those Catholics who were most likely to actively lead opposition to the new regime. In the end, the Catholic Church was allowed to continue to exist and operate; however, its capacity as a social agent was reduced to a minimal existence.

## B. CODIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS CONTROL

The newly created Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) imposed the same rigid controls on religion in the South as their predecessor, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, did in the North beginning in 1954.<sup>146</sup> The Vietnamese Workers Party organized the Fatherland Front in 1955, which replaced the Viet Minh as the nation-wide mass front organization. The Fatherland Front included many groups: Peasant's associations, labor unions, women and youth leagues, and religious organizations. This was done in the South in the 1975. Placing religion under the Fatherland Front helped the state regulate and control religion in two ways. First, it created support for the state and channeled citizens' concerns and criticisms in a non-threatening manner to the party.<sup>147</sup> Second, it officially restricted religious groups' autonomy and independence from the government. Under a branch of the Fatherland Front, each church was officially

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<sup>144</sup> Nguyen Van Canh, 168.

<sup>145</sup> Am Nguyen, 48.

<sup>146</sup> Vietnam was officially reunited on 2 July 1976 combining the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the former Republic of Vietnam into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

<sup>147</sup> Kerkvliet, "An Approach for Analyzing State-Society Relations in Vietnam," 246.

sanctioned by a state run ruling body. In this way, the VCP institutionalized control of religion.

In the political report delivered during the Fourth Party Congress held in December 1976, the VCP enunciated the foundation of its policy towards religion. Concerning religion the report made three points. First, the SRV “respect[s] the right to freedom of religion and the right to atheism.” Second, the Party’s goal was to “educate and motivate the masses and religious groups to implement political tasks set forth by the Party.” And third, the Party would “help free the churches from the imperialist shackles and return them to the people.”<sup>148</sup> This statement showed that the Party would superficially allow religion to exist, however, it clearly intended to control and direct religious groups’ agendas. The statement also reflected the Party’s paranoia of foreign intervention and subversion which it suspected of coming through religion. The authoritative Party journal, *Communist Review*, illustrated the Party’s fear of subversion coming through religion as it warned about “imperialist plots to capitalize on religion” and “imperialist and reactionary hiding behind religion.”<sup>149</sup>

To systematize and make official the state’s control of religion the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s Council of Ministers passed Resolution 297 in November 1977. The resolution attempted to bring all religious activities under detailed government regulation and scrutiny. In essence, the resolution provided the legal framework upon which the VCP has been able to officially suppress, control, and co-opt religion.

Resolution 297 instituted a comprehensive set of regulations which served to subordinate religion to the state. Government approval is required for practically all forms of religions activity. The resolution required religions to obtain government permission to hold any type of religious class, hold a training seminar, convention, or hold a celebration in addition to normally calendared events. It also required government approval to build, remodel, or repair a church and it required government approval to transfer clergy from one location to another.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, elucidating the state’s goal to co-opt clergy, the resolution stated that “besides preaching religious teachings,

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<sup>148</sup> Nguyen Van Canh, 165.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 166-167.

[clergymen] have the duty to mobilize followers to perform well citizen's obligations and to carry out well the policies and laws of the state."<sup>151</sup>

Priests had to show complete obedience and submissiveness to the party, as any deviation could cause him to lose his right to teach and be a priest. The provision states that priests must seek permission to conduct extraordinary celebrations, conduct all religious instruction, and that sermons must not spread superstitions nor speak against the socialist regime and must move the faithful to follow the VCP's political line.<sup>152</sup>

Local level government officials are responsible for granting permission to priests and ensure religious services or activities do not contravene the political line a broad range of arbitrary control over religions. Thus because power is centered at local levels, there is broad arbitrary power of the state to control religion effectively negated any claims of religious freedom mentioned in the resolution. The resolution claimed to "guarantee freedom of worship while preventing all anti-revolutionary forces from misusing religion to erect obstacles to the construction of socialism."<sup>153</sup> In this respect the resolution makes religious freedom empty of substance.

The Resolution prohibits the Catholic Church from enforcing any Vatican documents or policies that are contrary to the laws and policies of the state.<sup>154</sup> Again, this gives the state the legal ability to preempt Vatican control of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The state can reject any Vatican policy or decree by claiming it contravenes Vietnamese state law or policy.

As for obtaining religious books from the Vatican or other places, the resolution completely negates this by permitting religions to use only books published by the state-run printing press.

Lastly, Resolution 297 led to a severe shortage of priests—a shortage which negatively affects the Church but furthers the VCP agenda for exerting social control over Catholics. Resolution 297 states, "all religions may set up schools for the training of specialists in religious activities. The persons selected for training must enjoy civil rights,

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<sup>151</sup> Nguyen Van Canh, 167.

<sup>152</sup> Mais, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Evers, 14.

<sup>154</sup> Denney, 281.



prove their patriotism and love for socialism.”<sup>155</sup> As previously mentioned, all seminaries were closed and the first one was not reopened until 1983. It is difficult to open seminaries as the state claims the right to control the curriculum. Long negotiations must take place before a seminary can be opened so that the state feels it controls the curriculum and the Church feels doctrinal integrity is maintained. Aside from the lack of seminaries, the next big hurdle to increasing the number of priests is the requirements for selecting priesthood candidates. Before a potential candidate can enter the seminary, the government checks his “patriotic” background. It does this by examining individuals’ curriculum vitae.<sup>156</sup> Consideration is also given to a potential priest’s family and friends’ curriculum vitae.<sup>157</sup> If an individual is found to have a sufficiently patriotic background, then he is allowed to enter the seminary. Upon the completion of seminary, an individual must be reevaluated by the VCP before he is allowed to be ordained a priest. A candidate for the priesthood also must be from the region in which he will later work.<sup>158</sup> This potentially prevents good candidates entering the seminary if their area already has met its quota. The government’s meticulous screening process has made it very difficult for the Catholic Church to recruit, train, and ordain enough quality priests.

The basic effect of these policies is the clergy has less and less time to spend with Church members. Because of attrition the number of priests decreases and due to population growth, the population of the Church increases. Consequently, the state and the VCP are able to take a greater role and position of prominence in the lives of Church members. The dominant position in society once held by the Church becomes marginalized. The demographics of the Bui Chu diocese in the North in 1975 is a good example of the VCP’s plan to create a disproportion between the number of priests and members. In the Bui Chu diocese there were 31 priests for 143 parishes, or 4.6 parishes

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<sup>155</sup> Mais, 10.

<sup>156</sup> In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, individuals’ curriculum vitae are maintained by local VCP officials and contains information on early activities, contributions to the revolution, and entries about political views both before and after the revolution.

<sup>157</sup> Evers, 20.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 21.

and 11,290 Catholics per priest.<sup>159</sup> One priest cannot adequately serve 11,290 church members. The VCP intended to recreate this phenomenon in the South after 1975.

In the end, Resolution 297 gave the government control of the publication and distribution of all church material, the training, education, ordination, appointment, promotion, and transfer of clergy. The state also controlled all church property and maintained control of all religious schools and monasteries by controlling who teaches, who enters the school, the curriculum, and by making the state the only legal source of funding for the schools.<sup>160</sup>

In December 1980, the National Assembly ratified the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's first constitution. Article 68 dealt specifically with religion. The article concisely summarizes the VCP's view and policy towards religion. It states, "All citizens enjoy the freedom of worship, and may practice or not practice a religion." The next clause in the article provides the state with broad legal justification to dominate, control, and even co-opt religion. It states, "no one may misuse religions to violate state laws or policies."<sup>161</sup> Finally, Article 4 of the 1980 Constitution solidifies the VCP as the only force to lead Vietnam. The article authoritatively states, "The Vietnam Communist Party, the vanguard and general staff of the Vietnamese working class, armed with Marxism-Leninism, is the only force leading the state and society and the main factor determining all success of the Vietnamese revolution."<sup>162</sup> Thus from the 1980 constitution, if a religion is judged to propagate a doctrine or agenda not in harmony with the VCP, that religion can be found guilty of violating state law or policy. Any religion or religious official who strays from the Party's control could face harsh punitive repression for the institution and arrest and imprisonment for the official.

Resolution 297 and Article 68 of the 1980 Constitution make it clear that religious freedom depends on a church's compatibility with the VCP's socialist agenda and view of patriotism.

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<sup>159</sup> Denney, 290-291.

<sup>160</sup> Abuza, 187-188.

<sup>161</sup> Nguyen Van Canh, 166.

<sup>162</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, *Political Reform in Vietnam: Doi Moi and the Emergence of Civil Society*, in "The Development of Civil Society in Communist Systems," ed. Robert F. Miller (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1992), 110.

### C. KEEPING THE FAITH AMIDST SUPPRESSION

Shortly after the capitulation of the South to the North, the two archbishops of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van Binh and Nguyen Kim Diem, signed a joint statement which rejoiced over the peace brought by reunification. The statement called on Catholics to “march without fear” and help build the new society and to patriotically embrace government efforts to rebuild their war ravaged country.<sup>163</sup> This statement was arguably intended to assuage Communist concerns over the traditional anti-Communist Catholic view as much as it was to rally Catholic support for the new communist regime. The statement also demonstrated the clergy’s resolve for the Church to march forward in the faith—come what may with the new regime.

The regulations imposed upon the Church from Resolution 287 made administering to the spiritual needs of parishioners very difficult for the depleted Catholic clergy. Consequently, many activities were forced underground. Underground church activities from 1975 to 1986 focused solely on spiritual issues and avoided political matters. Underground activities included the following: circulating religious publications, organizing bible study groups, unofficial church associations, teaching catechism to children, unauthorized masses, and ordaining priests without government consent.<sup>164</sup> The clergy was forced to take such measures due to the previously discussed suppression and limitations imposed upon the Catholic clergy.

In April 1980 all bishops in Vietnam gathered in Hanoi for an Episcopal conference.<sup>165</sup> The Catholic Church in the North and in the South was separated in 1954 when Vietnam was divided. Due to forced political separation, the two Church’s developed separated organizational hierarchies. For all intents and purposes, the Church in Vietnam continued to operate as two churches, one in the north and one in the south, after national reunification in 1975. This conference was the first time since 1952 that all Vietnamese bishops were able to hold a general assembly. During the conference the bishops formed the Unified Bishops’ Council of Vietnam. They elected a permanent

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<sup>163</sup> Mais, 19.

<sup>164</sup> The teaching of catechism to children was banned after reunification. See Denney, 284.

<sup>165</sup> The conference was attended by all Vietnamese bishops except Pham Ngoc Chi of Danang and Nguyen Van Thuan who was imprisoned at the time.

council headed by Cardinal Trinh Van Can of Hanoi. The newly created Bishop's Council became the governing body of the Catholic Church in all of Vietnam.<sup>166</sup> Aside from marking the official reunification of the Northern and Southern Catholic Churches, the conference issued a letter to all Vietnamese setting forth an official position of the Catholic Church towards the new regime. The Conference urged Catholics to "contribute to national reconstruction and defense."<sup>167</sup>

After issuing this statement and convening the conference, bishops met with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. As a result of the statement and positive meeting with the Prime Minister, the government in principle allowed Vietnamese bishops to make the five-yearly *ad limina* visit to the Vatican with the Pope. The number of bishops allowed to make the visits has varied greatly with subsequent *ad limina* visits. In 1980 the government allowed 19 Vietnamese bishops to make the *ad limina* visit with the Pope.<sup>168</sup>

From 1975 to 1987 Catholic clergy in Vietnam had to go underground to take care of their members. In public they had to walk a tight line to ensure they did not run afoul with the government and that their preaching was in harmony with the VCP party-line. They also had to ensure they avoided even the appearance of political activity. All activity had to be isolated to spiritual issues. When the Church dealt with secular issues, particularly societal or political, it was met with quick and swift suppression from the government.

Nationally, the Catholic Church was able to establish a unified hierarchy, the Bishops Council, which was accepted by both the government of Vietnam and the Vatican. Statements by the Bishops Council emphasized Catholics' duty to rebuild the nation under the leadership of the VCP and exhibit true patriotism. This helped assuage the government's concerns concerning the Church as a whole and allowed the Church to resume minimal contact with the Vatican.

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<sup>166</sup> Denney, 282.

<sup>167</sup> Denney, 283.

<sup>168</sup> Evers, 15.

#### D. STATE COOPTATION OF THE CHURCH

To understand the full effects of the suppression and new limitations placed upon religion after reunification by the communist regime, we need to examine how the state co-opted church to further the VCP's political agenda and specifically what effect this had on the Catholic Church. The VCP viewed religion as a camouflage for colonialist and capitalist—that the French and American's had used religion to further their agendas in Vietnam. Thus the VCP saw in religion an inherent threat and a potential tool. The VCP would take care of this threat by turning religion into a political instrument.

A VCP internal paper dating from 1982 clearly states the religious policy with regards to the Catholic Church. The paper showed that the Party's aim was to transform the Catholic Church in Vietnam from “an instrument of imperialism and anti-communism into a religion in the service of the state, patriotic, and close to socialism.”<sup>169</sup> In other words, they intended to neutralize the Church as a potential threat to the Party's monopoly of power and social control and co-opt the Church so that it furthers the Party's agenda.

Resolution 297 on religion provides for the “specialist in religious activities” to be duty-bound to include in his or her sermons that which encourages others to fulfill their civic duties.<sup>170</sup> Thus the government's view of religions was that they were to be used as a mean of propagating the party-line and guidance for rebuilding society. Every time the Central Committee issued a new policy or directive, the Fatherland Front organized study sessions for priests and others in the mass organizations to explain the policy or directive and further indoctrinate them in socialism.<sup>171</sup> The priests were then responsible to support and convey the new party guidance to their parishioners.

This brand of cooptation took away from the priest's ability to preach pure unadulterated doctrine. Instead, a priest had to allow himself to be used for propaganda purposes. Intelligence officers watched over parishes to ensure sermons did not veer from the party's agenda. If the priest was found to diverge from the party-line in either

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<sup>169</sup> Evers, 15.

<sup>170</sup> Mais, 14.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

secular or spiritual matters, he could be subject to harassment, interrogation, arrests, and/or indefinite imprisonment.<sup>172</sup>

In 1983 the government attempted to subvert the Bishops Council. Under the auspices of the Fatherland Front, the government organized the Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics. This committee replaced the former Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peace-Loving Catholics which had led the Catholic Church in the North since 1955. The Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics, like its Northern predecessor, the Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peace-Loving Catholics, became the official mass organization for Catholics. The Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics was a part of the Fatherland Front which was in turn the VCP's front organization for to control and direct all mass organizations. In this way, the Catholic Church became directly organized under the VCP. It became a means, like all other mass organizations incorporated in the Fatherland Front, for the VCP to channel its guidance to build socialism in Vietnam. The group also became the official liaison between the government and the Church—thus marginalizing the Bishops Council.

The government first tried to establish the Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics in the South in 1976. However, this met much resistance from Southern bishops. Finally, in 1980, Archbishop of Saigon, Paul Nguyen Van Binh, agreed to the establishment of a nascent liaison committee. Finally, in 1983, the Southern Bishops conceded to combining their nascent liaison committee with the Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peace-Loving Catholics in the North to establish the nation-wide Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics.<sup>173</sup>

The VCP's Fatherland Front led the initiative to establish the Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics. The Fatherland Front also chose all the delegates. The delegates sent to form the group were not blessed by their bishops or their diocese – just picked by the Fatherland Front.<sup>174</sup> Church leaders did not have a say in who attended and thus those priests who attended did not represent the Church leaders. Vietnamese bishops were greatly concerned over the new organization. They feared the creation of an

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<sup>172</sup> Am Nguyen, 45.

<sup>173</sup> Evers, 23.

<sup>174</sup> Mais, 21.

autonomous church separate from the Vatican. They did not want what happened in China to happen in Vietnam.<sup>175</sup> The new committee split the allegiance of Catholics between the Vatican and the VCP. Since all Vietnamese had to first follow the dictates of the Party and government, the new committee would become the ultimate authority for the Vietnamese Church in Vietnam, regardless what the Vatican or the Bishops Council said.

The purpose of the new committee as outlined in article two of the Committee's charter made this clear. It stated that the committee is to "mobilize Vietnamese Catholics to defend the socialist regime, fight against imperialists and reactionaries who use religion to oppose the regime and unite with Christians around the world in support of peace, justice, and social progress."<sup>176</sup> The head of the state's Bureau of Religious Affairs, Dang Thanh Chon, made the implications of the purpose of the committee even clearer. He stated that the new Committee was a state organism, thus whoever opposes it "evidently violates the law in Vietnam."<sup>177</sup> This statement made following the Bishops Council over the Committee an illegal act which goes directly against the party.

The Archbishop of Hue, Msgr. Nguyen Kim Dien, publicly opposed the new committee. He went as far as suspending one of the Friars from his diocese for attending the meeting. Msgr. Nguyen sent a letter to the president of the committee, Father Nguyen The Vinh stating that the Committee had been formed without the bishops blessing and expressed his fear that this could result in a formation of a separate Church as is held in China. Msgr. Nguyen said the group should refer the matter to the Episcopal Conference (Bishops Council) who alone held the authority to direct the activities of the Church in Vietnam. The letter was forwarded to the Fatherland Front. Msgr. Nguyen was summoned for 50 days of interrogations. After being released from interrogation, he was subject to tight surveillance from security authorities and was not permitted to leave the city of Hue. The government's response to Archbishop Nguyen's position and attitude towards the committee clearly shows the state did not view this as an internal matter of

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<sup>175</sup> In China the Communist Party of China (CCP) essentially created a new Catholic Church autonomous from the Vatican and subordinate to the CCP.

<sup>176</sup> Denney, 287.

<sup>177</sup> Mais, 15.

the Church but a matter of the state and that Archbishop Nguyen had gone against the party's agenda.<sup>178</sup>

The Unifying Committee of Patriotic Catholics became the state's official representation of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. This committee combined with the regulations placed upon the Church in Resolution 297 allowed VCP to co-opt the Church. In particular the VCP was able to screen all priests, sermons, church meetings, publications, development of junior priests, and use the Church as a means of state and Party propagation.

#### E. CONCLUSION

By 1987 for the vast majority of Catholics who either freely or were forced to submit to state domination and Party cooption, life remained a challenge. Vietnamese who identified themselves as Catholics on their identification card or their curriculum vitae were frequently singled out and viewed the government authorities with suspicion as someone associated with an inherently anti-revolution and Party ideology.<sup>179</sup> Being a Catholic in 1987 still made one nominally a second class citizen. Vietnam's policy towards religious groups was carried out towards the Catholic Church by first suppressing elements within the Church that could lead to or support active overt opposition to the new communist state. Next, the government took away the Church's ability and capacity to autonomously lead and guide civil society. Finally, the government established means to co-opt the Church such that functionally and institutionally, the Church acted as a social and political agent for the VCP. Vietnam was able to successfully weaken the Church to the point that the state could nominally control the Church and use it to promote the Party's social and political agenda.

During the period from 1975 to 1987 when Vietnam existed in a state of autarky, Vietnam was relatively isolated from the world and pursued policies with little concern for international opinion or consequences. Many outside groups—including the Vatican, overseas Vietnamese groups, and human rights groups—opposed Vietnam's suppression and denial of religious freedom in Vietnam. However, during this period the Vietnamese

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<sup>178</sup> Mais, 23-24.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 2.



government had little-to-no incentive to pursue anything but its own single-minded agenda of rebuilding Vietnam under the socialist model. This started to change as Vietnam instituted the *Doi Moi* reforms introduced at the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986. The next chapter will examine these changes and how moving from a state of autarky to one of complex interdependence in the global community has given Vietnam an incentive to adapt more to international norms and how this has produced a different outlook on religion and an increased degree of religious freedom for religions.

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#### IV. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM, 1987 – 2004

The *Doi Moi* reforms in 1986 marked the beginning of Vietnam's reentrance into the integrating international economy and world community. This also marked the beginning of a gradual change in the VCP's view towards and treatment of the Catholic Church. The desire to improve its economy and to consolidate its power led the Vietnamese communists to seek trade and diplomatic relations with western nations and multilateral organizations. While Vietnam is not explicitly beholden to the norms of its new trading or multilateral partners, it has of necessity become increasingly sensitive to the norms of its new partners in order to maintain sustained and viable economic relations. Human rights, which includes freedom of religion, is one of such collective norms set.

In 1996, ten years after implementing the *Doi Moi* reforms, Cardinal Pham Dinh Tung of the Hanoi Archdiocese expressed optimism that the situation for the Catholic Church in Vietnam would improve after years of repression because of the arrival of foreign investment and the increased accompanying international pressure for liberalization.<sup>180</sup> How has the situation for the Catholic Church in Vietnam improved because of globalization? To answer this question, this chapter will explore how Vietnam's integration into the international community has affected the Catholic Church in Vietnam.

I examine the effects of globalization on the Catholic Church in Vietnam in six areas: the official Vietnamese view of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, the extent of change in Vatican interaction with Vietnam, the autonomy of Catholic the Church's role in society, Church activity levels, regulations on religion, and general international views on the state of religion in Vietnam. The subsequent study of these six areas will provide indications which show how the situation for the Catholic Church in Vietnam has improved since Vietnam immersed from its state of autarky and entered an era of international integration.

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<sup>180</sup> "Holy See Tries Diplomatic Approach to Vietnam," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 14 October 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=2595>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

#### A. CHANGING VCP VIEWS TOWARD THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The VCP's view of the Catholic Church has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. There are indications that the VCP's shift of attitude towards the Catholic Church also mirror an internal, more subdued, gradual opening up towards the Church. Vietnam's international integration beginning in 1986 is the chief catalyst driving the VCP's improved view of the Church.

During Vietnam's period of autarky (1976-1986), the government's policy was to marginalize the Catholic Church and co-opt the Church into being a state – controlled means of implementing VCP policy. The Sixth National Party Congress, which marked the beginning of Vietnam's shift towards a policy of engaging and interacting with the global community, also enunciated the beginning of a change in the official view towards religion and the Catholic Church in particular. During the Congress, the new Secretary-General of the VCP, Nguyen Van Linh, specifically promised to implement measures to respect religious freedom and improve relations with the Catholic Church.<sup>181</sup>

As the *Doi Moi* reforms took hold, Vietnam shifted its approach to dealing with the Catholic Church from one which the UNHCR labeled persecution and discrimination to what Auxiliary Bishop of Hanoi Francois-Xavier Nguyen Van Sang described to the Pope during a visit the Vatican in October 1987 as one of “détente and openness.”<sup>182</sup> By the Seventh National Party Congress held in 1990, the VCP's perception of the Catholic Church as an “instrument of westernization and colonization” began to give way to attitudes, at least on the surface, which appeared to embrace religion and the Catholic Church as an important player in Vietnamese society.<sup>183</sup>

The Seventh National Party Congress report emphatically stated, “most people have a spiritual need for religions and beliefs; this need will persist for a long time to come,” and “there are a number of aspects to religious teachings which are particularly

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<sup>181</sup> Mais, 1.

<sup>182</sup> See United Nations Commission on Human Rights, “Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Religious Intolerance,” Addendum, *Visit to Vietnam*, 1998, par. 72; available from <http://www.fva.org/document/amor.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 September 2004; and Denney, 285.

<sup>183</sup> United Nations Commission on Human Rights, par. 72.

useful for building a new society.”<sup>184</sup> This was the first public admission by the VCP of the utility of religion in building a new, VCP-led, society.

Commenting further on the improving situation for religious freedom in Vietnam, the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Religious Freedom made the following observations in a report submitted to the United Nations’ Commission of Human Rights in 1998:

Since the policy of openness was introduced in 1990, there have generally been some positive developments, in particular the Government’s recognition of the positive role of religions and the fact that it is moving away from an anti-religious policy and towards the authorization, with a framework that is well defined, limited and controlled by the authorities, of religious practice and the building of places of worship.<sup>185</sup>

The Special Rapporteur’s comments indicated the Vietnamese government was giving religious institutions more room to maneuver, but within the confines of continued rigid regulations and policies governing belief systems and religious institutions.

The Party seeks to gain international credit for the Church’s good works by working with it. In the international arena, rather than be perceived as a suppressor and persecutor of religion, a view that wins no favor with the international community, Vietnam wants to come across as a state that works with religious organizations in a harmonious effort to advance Vietnam and alleviate suffering and poverty. In reality, while the government gives religious organizations more room to maneuver, the government only gives leeway to secure international public relations points. At the end of the day, religions are still persecuted, yet at the same time, the VCP has recognized the utilitarian value of religion and decided to more fully incorporate and embrace religion in state policy.

There are several indications that this is the Party’s plan towards religious institutions and the Catholic Church in particular. In 1996 the Party called on the Catholics to “contribute more to the development of society and the drive to modernize

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<sup>184</sup> As cited in United Nations Commission on Human Rights, par. 33.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, par. 111.

the nation.”<sup>186</sup> This is significant in two ways. First, by calling upon the Catholic Church to “contribute”, the Party implied that the Church has positive relevance to society. Second, it recognized the significant role the Church has in “modernizing” Vietnam. This indicates that the Party has finally separated the long held stigma of French colonialism and modernization from the Catholic Church.

The government now relies upon and makes requests to the Church in ways which were previously unimaginable. In 1997, thousands of Catholics protested in Dong Nai province over expropriation of Church property and allegations that state authorities were selling Church properties. Riot police were brought in to quell the mayhem. In spite of an obvious connection to religion, government officials were extremely reticent to draw a connection between the riots and the Church.<sup>187</sup> However, behind closed doors, local Dong Nai authorities requested senior Catholic Bishop Paul Marie Nguyen Minh Nhat to intervene and issue a statement calling for peace.<sup>188</sup> This is an example of the government relying on the Church because they determined it was not in their best interest inflict a severe and violent crack down that could potentially garner much negative international attention. This example does not necessarily reflect a change in national policy, but it does reflect the willingness of local Party leaders to work with Church leaders and seek their help. It also shows the government’s awareness and sensitivity to international pressures. The situation reflects a softening of what was once a very harsh position towards the Catholic Church.

Another example of a general relaxation of the government’s posture and view towards the Catholic Church is the story of Cardinal Francois Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. In 1975, then Bishop Thuan was imprisoned for 13 years by the new communist government because of personal ties to former Republic of Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem. After release he was subjected to house arrest and continual persecution. Finally in 1991 he was forced into exile. While working in the Vatican, as the head of the

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<sup>186</sup> “Vietnam Says Catholics Should Contribute More to Communist Society,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 24 December 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=3323>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>187</sup> Croissant wants a source for this evidence or interpretation.

<sup>188</sup> “Vietnam Catholics Hold New Protests,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 1 December 1997; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=6407>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Bishop Thuan was elevated to the College of Cardinals. In 2001, Cardinal Thuan was finally given permission to return to Vietnam on a tourist visa.<sup>189</sup> In 2002 when Cardinal Thuan died, Vietnamese officials did not interfere or attempt to discourage a memorial mass for the late Cardinal.<sup>190</sup> Why the change? It appears likely the government dissociated Cardinal Thuan from its previous suspicions to take advantage of the positive image. At the same time, Cardinal Thuan, was the second ever Vietnamese Cardinal. The fact the VCP eventually changed its position and allowed Cardinal Thuan to return to Vietnam and allowed Vietnamese Catholics to hold memorial masses is a strong indication of the VCP's change in view towards the Catholic Church.

## B. STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN

A unique aspect of the Catholic Church is the Vatican. The Vatican as a state can establish state-to-state relations. The trend of official rapprochement experienced between the Vatican and Hanoi during the last 15 years is another indicator of the VCP's improved view of the Catholic Church. The basic course of rapprochement between the Vatican and Hanoi has followed Vietnam's post-*Doi Moi* integration with the international community.

The Seventh Party Congress in 1991 officially enunciated Vietnam's new orientation in foreign policy. The party congress report stated: "Vietnam wishes to be a friend of all countries in the world community striving for peace, independence, and development."<sup>191</sup> In 1989 Vietnam had diplomatic relations with only 23 nations; by 1996, this number had grown to 163.<sup>192</sup> The Vatican was not among the 140 nations with whom Vietnam established diplomatic relations from 1990 to 1995 when it

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<sup>189</sup> "Vietnam Lifts Ban of New Cardinal," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 1 March 2001; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=14961>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>190</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices--2002: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 31 March 2003), viewed at <http://vietnamhumanrights.net/english/documents/vietnam-state02/htm>; accessed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>191</sup> Bui Thanh Son, *Vietnam-U.S. Relations and Vietnam's Foreign Policy in the 1990s*, in "Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition," eds. Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 203.

<sup>192</sup> Thayer, *Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution*, 5.

reoriented its foreign policy following the Seventh Party Congress. However, discussions between the two began in earnest during this period.

The leading sources of tension between the Vatican and Hanoi were Hanoi's reluctance to restore land confiscated from the Church in 1975 and Hanoi's refusal to accept the Vatican's episcopal nominations—Hanoi wanted the Vatican to seek government clearance for all appointments in the priesthood.

The first official visit to Vietnam by Vatican officials came in 1990. This inaugurated a regular series of visits between Hanoi and the Vatican to discuss issues concerning Catholics in Vietnam. From 1990-2004, the Vatican and Vietnamese officials have met eleven times hold discussions. At the time of this writing Vietnam and the Vatican have not yet established formal diplomatic relations. However, considerable progress towards establishing diplomatic relations has been made in the past fifteen years in spite of many ups and downs.

In 1992, the Vatican and Hanoi laid the ground work for dealing with one of the main points of contention between the two: the selection process and ordination of new bishops. The Vatican long held it had the right to autonomously make episcopal appointments. Hanoi, on the other hand posited it had to ensure that only supporters of the revolution became social leaders in Vietnam. As such, the VCP claimed the right to dictate who did or did not become Catholic priests. During the 1992 talks between the Vatican and Hanoi, an agreement was established under which the Vatican would submit names of would-be bishops for the government's approval. The agreement allowed the Vatican to stay in control of the selection process; however, the Vietnamese government got to exercise veto power and have the last say in the process.

Talks on the appointment of bishops between the Vatican and Hanoi broke down in early 1995 and then after 18 months in October 1996, talks resumed.<sup>193</sup> The Church was not ordaining enough priests or sustaining enough priests to keep up with attrition. When a bishop died many dioceses were left empty, without a leader, or grossly undermanned. The Vatican representatives rigorously negotiated with VCP officials to

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<sup>193</sup> "Holy See Tries Diplomatic Approach to Vietnam," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line];

<sup>14</sup> October 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=2595>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.



clear episcopal nominations in order to alleviate the scarcity of church leaders. In 1999 the Hanoi archdiocese had approximately 400,000 Catholics with 130 parishes which were all about 5 to 20 kilometers apart connected by poor roads. The diocese had only 40 priests. This equated to each priest having to administer to 10,000 Catholics each. A more extreme example of the scarcity issue with which the Vatican was striving to rectify was in the Lang Son diocese located in the mountainous border regime next to China. In 1999, the diocese had one 97-year old priest to administer to 16 parishes scattered throughout the mountainous diocese.<sup>194</sup> Clearly in a situation like this, the Church could not expect to sustain or support itself. The Vatican worked urgently to fix these types of situations.

Another chief Vatican goal in the talks was to move Hanoi and the Vatican closer to achieving official diplomatic relations. The rationale was that if the Vatican and Hanoi establish diplomatic relations, it would be more difficult for the VCP to restrict the religious freedom of Catholics. Catholics in Vietnam would have an official diplomatic outlet of recourse in the event of VCP meddling into Church affairs.

The year 1999 marked an acute improvement in public VCP rhetoric towards the Vatican. In 1999, Hanoi gave indications it might be ready to seriously begin establishing relations with the Vatican. During a press conference following the 1999 talks, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson told reporters that the question of diplomatic ties with the Vatican would be on the agenda for the upcoming talks.<sup>195</sup> Another indicator or warning relations also came during the 1999 talks. During the talks, the Vietnamese government showed favorable signs toward the possibility of a Papal visit to Vietnam.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> "50 Years of Challenges for Vietnamese Cardinal," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line];

29 June 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=10643>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>195</sup> "Vietnam Hints at Diplomatic Ties with Holy See," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 4 March 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=9766>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>196</sup> "Diplomatic Relations Soon for Vatican, Vietnam?" *Catholic World News* [home page on-line];

25 March 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=9919>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

A significant step taken by Hanoi towards advancing relations with the Vatican took place in December 2002 when Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Wu Khoang was the first high ranking official of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to visit the Vatican. His visit focused on discussions concerning the need to intensify the cooperation between church and state for the benefit of all Vietnamese society.<sup>197</sup> Regular dialogue between the Vatican and Hanoi continues; however, diplomatic relations have not yet been established and no Papal visit has taken place.

The Vatican's regular visits to Vietnam have afforded Hanoi an opportunity to enjoy the positive international image of meeting officially with the head of a major world religion. The VCP uses its developing relationship with the Vatican to make favorable public comments about the Catholic Church in an attempt to shape the international opinion of Vietnam to one of religious toleration, freedom, and acceptance. For instance after the departure of the Vatican delegation in June 2001, Vietnamese government officials stated that they viewed "the Catholic Church as a positive force."<sup>198</sup> During the May 2004 talks, the Hanoi formally and publicly asserted to Vatican officials that Vietnamese Catholics are full and productive citizens.<sup>199</sup> The VCP may have great differences with the Vatican, but at the same time the VCP uses its developing relationship with the head of an international religion as a showpiece of international positive public relations. Vietnam wants to show the world that it deals with religions in a constructive manner.

In sum, while formal diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Vatican have not yet been achieved, the regular talks have been beneficial for both parties. The Church has secured increasing numbers of papal episcopal appointments which have helped ease the dearth of Church officials in Vietnam. Vietnam has been able to improve its international image, address ways for the Catholic Church to best meet and help further

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<sup>197</sup> "Vietnamese Deputy Premier Visits Vatican," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 2 December 2002; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=19432>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>198</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2001 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 16 October 2001), page 3; accessed at [http://www.uscifr.gov/dos01Pages/irf\\_vietnam.php3?scale=1280](http://www.uscifr.gov/dos01Pages/irf_vietnam.php3?scale=1280); Internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>199</sup> "Vatican Envoy Sees Progress toward Religions Freedom in Vietnam," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 13 May 2004; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=29547>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

the VCP's agenda, and maximize its power and control over the Catholic Church while minimizing the perception of overt control and suppression.

### C. THE AUTONOMY OF THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD

One of the VCP's strategies to weakening the control of the Church over parishioners was to marginalize and thus weaken Church leadership. Without strong leadership, Catholics' ties to the Church would weaken and consequently the support and loyalty of Vietnamese Catholics would then be more easily be channeled towards the Party. A primary method of achieving this was to decrease the number of priests.

This rigid vetting and screening process gave the VCP broad room and justification to keep the number of priests and bishops low by vetoing ordinations. The VCP uses other, at times capricious, means to influence who becomes a priest or bishop. An example of this influence took place in 1997 upon the return of Vietnamese bishops from their *ad limina* visit with the Pope. While at the Vatican the Vietnamese bishops prepared a confidential list of 41 candidates for various open episcopal offices in Vietnam. Upon reentry into Vietnam, the list was discovered and seized by police while the bishops were going through customs. The VCP then published the list in newspapers to influence who the Church would nominate for episcopal office.<sup>200</sup>

The government also held up nominations for key episcopal offices. This took place in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City—the largest of Vietnam's three archdiocese. In July 1995, Archbishop Paul Nguyen Van Binh died leaving the archbishopric of the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese empty. The VCP refused to accept the Vatican's nomination to fill the empty archbishopric for three years. Finally, in April 1998, after much negotiation between the Vatican and Hanoi, Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man was installed as the new Archbishop. The fact that the VCP forced the largest archdiocese in Vietnam to remain empty served to weaken the Church.<sup>201</sup> The appointment of a new archbishop in Ho Chi Minh City after three years was a sign that

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<sup>200</sup> "Vietnamese Government Pressing Catholic Bishops," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line];

10 June 1997; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=5431>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>201</sup> "New Vietnam Archbishop Installed," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 2 April 1998; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=7329>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

Hanoi still wanted to ensure it could influence who became Church leaders. At the same time, the Vatican's successful negotiations to appoint Archbishop Man indicate the VCP's position towards the Church was softening and its willingness to compromise with the Church was increasing.

In 1999, nine priests were ordained by Archbishop Man in Ho Chi Minh City. All the new priests were members of Catholic orders.<sup>202</sup> Catholic orders were traditionally regarded by the VCP with particular suspicion because they belong to international organizations. The fact that nine members of an international Catholic order were ordained serves as a small sign of opening toward religion.<sup>203</sup>

In September 2003 the Vatican announced that Archbishop Jean-Batiste Pham Minh Man would be elevated to the rank of Cardinal. Immediately after the announcement, Vietnam's Committee for Religious Affairs refused to recognize the appointment on grounds that it had not been consulted first. After an open apology from the Vatican to the government of Vietnam and two days of discussion, the Vietnamese government changed its position and accepted the appointment.<sup>204</sup> This was the first time that such a high appointment was resolved without the sending of a special delegation from the Vatican to Hanoi to engage in extensive negotiations. The government congratulated the new Cardinal, welcomed him as Vietnam's new second cardinal, and stated that having him as a Cardinal was an "honor for everyone in Vietnam."<sup>205</sup> Vietnam's religious-affairs minister said that Vietnam was "happy to count a Catholic cardinal among its citizens."<sup>206</sup> Cardinal Man reported that the quick

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<sup>202</sup> Two Dominicans, two Jesuits, two Redemptorists, one Franciscan, one Sulpice Father, and one member of the Nazareth Institute.

<sup>203</sup> "Vietnam Permits Nine Ordinations Planned for March," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line];

16 February 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=9632>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>204</sup> "Vietnam Government Refuses to Recognize Appointment of New Cardinal," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 29 September 2003; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=24981>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>205</sup> "Vietnam Government Refuses to Recognize Appointment of New Cardinal," *Catholic World News*.

<sup>206</sup> "Viet Government, in Reversal, Welcomes Cardinal's Nomination" *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 3 October 2003; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=25097>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

acceptance of the appointment was “a sign of warming between relations between the government of Vietnam” and the Church.<sup>207</sup> The quick change in position suggests the increasing importance of international image and opinion to the VCP. From the VCP perspective, counting a high ranking Catholic figure as one of Vietnam’s own is a tangible sign to the world that Vietnam has religious freedom.

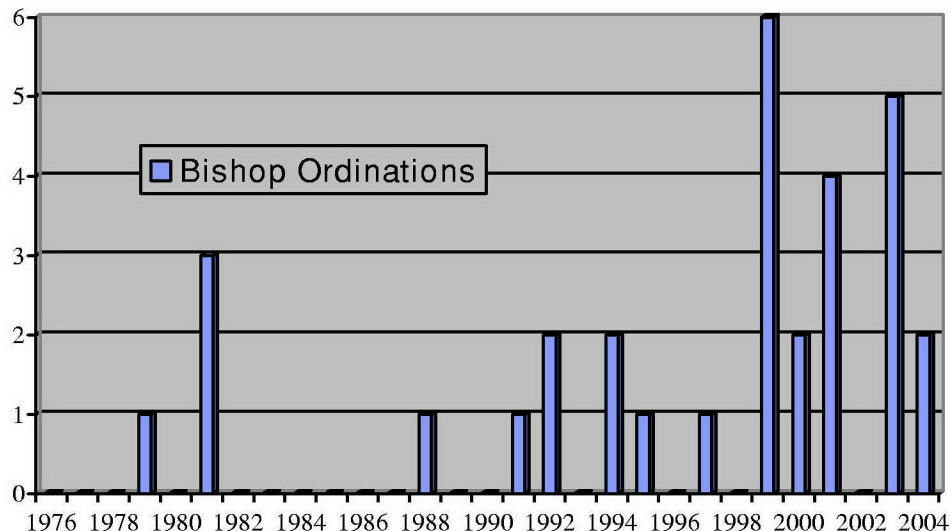
Regular talks between the Vatican and Hanoi have greatly helped improve the position of the Church in Vietnam. Negotiations over nominations to fill vacant bishoprics have been a top agenda item during all talks between Vatican and Hanoi. Without the Vatican, an international and independent actor, acting on behalf of the priesthood candidates and bishop nominees, the Catholic Church in Vietnam today would have far fewer priests and bishops. The role Vatican officials have played in lobbying Hanoi officials have greatly helped the Catholic Church keep its leadership positions filled.

This is evident by looking the number of Bishops ordained per year. While Vietnam was in a period of autarky from 1976 to 1986, only four bishops were ordained. Since *Doi Moi* was launched in 1986, and especially after the Vatican and Hanoi began holding regular talks in 1990, 27 bishops have been ordained. Twenty-six of the 27 ordinations took place after the Vatican and Hanoi began holding regular talks in 1990.

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<sup>207</sup> “New Vietnam Cardinal says Government Approves his Appointment,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 1 October 2003; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=25041>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

Figure 1. Catholic Bishop Ordinations in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam<sup>208</sup>



Socialist Vietnam had restricted the ability of Catholic priests to freely travel in their respected parish or diocese in order to administer to their parishioners and carry out their ecclesiastical responsibilities. While there have been many increases in the ability of the Catholic Church to operate and perform religious functions and duties, priests are still limited to moving freely within their assigned parish. Travel outside their parish requires permission from local government and party leaders. Because many priests are assigned to more than one parish, the government can impede Church operations by not granting permission for a priest to travel out of his primary parish.

During a special meeting with the Pope in 1996, Vietnamese bishops reported to the Pope that priests are always under surveillance.<sup>209</sup> Due to tight surveillance, priests find there is no way around the difficult paperwork and frequently capricious process of getting permission to visit all their assigned parishioners. Because of the restrictions against traveling outside of one's parish or diocese, priests cannot organize meetings of the laity as needed. The laity can only meet when under the existing officially sanctioned

<sup>208</sup> Data in chart derived from "Catholic-Hierarchy"[on-line]; viewed at <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org>; accessed on 27 February 2005.

<sup>209</sup> "Church in Vietnam Lives with Restraints," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 30 December 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=3348>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

gatherings or by obtaining special permission. This gives the government control over the laity in that only the government can authorize a meeting of all Vietnamese priests.

In 1999 Cardinal Pham Dinh Tung of the Hanoi Archdiocese sent a letter to Prime Minister Pham Van Khai complaining of restrictions on the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Specifically, he argued priests face a “bureaucratic minefield” when attempting to gain permission to travel within their own parishes.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, Cardinal Tung complained of numerous and frequent delays with applications to reassign priests within parishes.

Ostensibly, the situation has improved somewhat. The U.S. State Department’s *International Religious Freedom Report* in 2004, reported that the Vietnamese government “allowed many Catholic bishops and priests to travel freely within their dioceses and allowed greater, but sometimes restricted, freedom for domestic travel outside these areas.”<sup>211</sup> While there are still restrictions on the free movement and travel, the report specifically notes that the situation has improved. The report does not, however, specify to what degree freedom of travel has improved. It does point out however, that travel area in ethnic areas is especially restrictive. As for freedom to assign priests, the report points out that Catholic leaders were able to assign priests “more easily than in the past, even in some remote areas where no priests had been assigned for decades.”<sup>212</sup>

This report is indicative of a positive trend towards increasing freedom of travel. Priests still have to obtain permission to travel, but that permission is given much more readily today. As Vietnam becomes increasingly internationally integrated, domestic freedom of travel for priests seems to be slowly improving.

Another area of Church-State-relations where one can find improvements in the Catholic priesthood’s freedom of performing its official duties is the interaction between

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<sup>210</sup> “50 Years of Challenges for Vietnamese Cardinal,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line];

<sup>29</sup> June 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=10643>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>211</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 15 September 2004), Sec 2, “Restrictions on Religious Freedom; accessed at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35433.htm>; Internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, Sec. 2, “Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom.”

priests and the international Catholic community that over the past 15 years Prior to the implementation of *Doi Moi* in 1986 and well into the nineties, international travel by Vietnamese Catholic priests was very limited and tightly controlled by the party. International travel and interaction with the greater Catholic Church remains tightly controlled by the party today, but the ability of priests to travel and interact internationally has increased.

Every five years all Catholic Bishops travel to the Vatican to attend the *ad limina*” visit with the Pope. The meeting allows Catholics to receive training, counsel, and maintain a sense of doctrinal purity. During the 1996 *ad limina* visit only 14 of Vietnam’s 22 bishops received government permission to attend.<sup>213</sup> In 2002, for the first time, all Vietnamese Bishops were allowed to attend the *ad limina* visit. It seems probable that the warming relationships between the Vatican and Hanoi served to incline the government to allow all Bishops attend.

The U.S. State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report in 2004 reported that “Catholic Bishops face no restrictions on international travel, including to Rome, and many nuns have also been able to go abroad for study and conferences.”<sup>214</sup> This represents a great improvement in priests’ ability to travel internationally over just 10 years previously.

#### D. ROLE WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

The 1996 U.S. Human Rights report on Vietnam reported that the government of Vietnam prohibits the Catholic Church from educational and charitable activities.<sup>215</sup> The main reason for this was so the party was the main provider of social services. Essentially, the government wanted to minimize the Catholic Church’s impact on society and prevent it from challenging the party for the loyalty and devotion of the people.

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<sup>213</sup> “Church in Vietnam Lives with Restraints,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 30 December 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=25041>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>214</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam*; Sec 2, “Restrictions on Religious Freedom.”

<sup>215</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Vietnam Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 30 January 1997); Sec 2, “Freedom of Religion”; accessed at <http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net/English/documents/vietnam-State96.htm>; internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.



Beginning in the mid-1990s however, the VCP began allowing the Catholic Church to take a much more active role in providing social services. I attribute this increase to pressure the Party felt from its continued push towards international integration.<sup>216</sup> This is manifest in three areas: 1) the Church's increased ability to provide acts of Church-sponsored charity, 2) the opening of Catholic schools and institutions, and 3) the proliferation of religious NGOs.

#### 1. Church-Sponsored Charity

In October 1996 during talks between the Vatican and Hanoi, Vatican officials made it known that they would like to "collaborate in a constructive manner" with the government so that the Church could work once again in the areas of education, health, and agriculture.<sup>217</sup> The government tacitly agreed that such type of cooperation would be "desirable." This was a first step to returning to working in society for the Church. The Vatican continued to press for the Church to play a role in society. After the February 1998 talks between the Vatican and Hanoi, VCP officials promised to recognize the role of the Catholic Church in addressing "social ills such as drugs, prostitution, and corruption."<sup>218</sup> The 1999 U.S. Human Rights Report on Vietnam suggested that Vietnam did in fact act on its words. The report stated that the government has "relaxed its prohibition on Catholic Church's participation in religious education and charitable activities."<sup>219</sup>

In 1999 Vietnam faced some of the worst flooding in 35 years. The devastation resulted in 600 deaths and 600,000 destroyed homes.<sup>220</sup> The floods afforded the Church an opportunity to see if the government would in fact allow it to provide organized relief

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<sup>216</sup> Magda Hornemann, "Vietnam: Implementation Will Test New Religious Ordinance," *Forum 18*, 21 September 2004 [homepage on-line]; viewed at [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=415&printer=Y](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=415&printer=Y); internet; accessed on 20 January 2005.

<sup>217</sup> "Vatican Envoy Reports on Church in Vietnam" *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 28 October 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=2746>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>218</sup> "Vietnam Government Restricts Marian Pilgrimage," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 30 July 1998; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=8195>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>219</sup> 1999 U.S. Human Rights Report on Vietnam, 12.

<sup>220</sup> "Pope Send More Aid For Vietnamese Flood Victims," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 23 November 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=11627>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

to flood victims. Vietnamese Church leaders freely leveraged domestic and international Catholic resources to provide relief to flood victims. The Pope sent U.S. \$100 thousand. The money was given to bishops to then be distributed in the seven effected provinces.<sup>221</sup> This was significant because the government allowed the Church to accept money from the Vatican and also allowed the Church to distribute the money as the Church saw fit. The Church enjoyed freedom from governmental oversight during the distribution of Vatican relief funds.

From Vietnam, Cardinal Pham Dinh Tung of the Hanoi Archdiocese made appeals domestically and abroad to raise funds to provide emergency assistance for flood victims.<sup>222</sup> This was the first time the government allowed the Vietnamese Church officials to make such a public appeal for international assistance. The following year in 2000, areas in southern Vietnam again faced severe flooding. This time Archbishop John Pham Minh Man from the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese was allowed to travel to Europe to collect funds for flood victims in his dioceses.<sup>223</sup>

There are several plausible explanations for why the Vietnamese government would now allow Church leaders to provide charity. First, as the Vietnamese state became more market-driven, it became more focused on overall economic growth in the Vietnamese economy. A strong economy provides legitimacy to the VCP and its policies. Therefore, if a church which is not openly opposed to the state provides charitable needs to society, then it is not viewed as taking away from the state, but rather helping the nation get back on its feet by infusing aid to troubled areas. By the latter 1990s and into the new century, the VCP and government of Vietnam felt much more comfortable with leaders in the Vietnamese Catholic Church. For instance, Cardinal John Pham Minh Man, the second most senior leader in the Church in Vietnam, is viewed as a moderate

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid. don't start Ibid on the beginning of the footnote – copy footnote from previous page

<sup>222</sup> “Vietnam Cardinal Calls for Help For Flood Victims,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 12 November 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=11532>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>223</sup> “Vietnam Christians Hope for Religious Freedom From Clinton Visit,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 7 November 1996; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=25041>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

who believes in engaging and working with the VCP-led government.<sup>224</sup> The VCP has allowed Catholics to more actively participate in charity and social work because it ultimately helps the Vietnamese economy grow and because of increased trust in senior Church leadership.

## 2. Catholic Schools and Institutions

Another area recently opened for Catholics to participate in society was the operation of schools and institutions. Within the past five years, Catholic priests and nuns have begun operating kindergartens and vocational training centers.<sup>225</sup> The main thrust of their work is in the area of social services. The Church provides services which the government struggles to adequately provide. The Church has reverted to providing traditional aid to society, such as operating orphanages, and new contemporary services such as operating HIV-AIDS hospices and treatment centers.

In some areas, particularly in the south, the government readily recognizes its shortcomings and the Church's abilities. An example of this was seen in a state-operated HIV-AIDS treatment center in a province outside of Ho Chi Minh City. The government was facing difficulty running the center. To address the problem, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs asked the local Catholic dioceses to work with the government to manage and operate the treatment program.<sup>226</sup> This type of Church and state cooperation reflects the overall increased acceptance of the Church's active role in society. The 2004 U.S. State Department report on Vietnam positively reports that "Catholic priests and nuns continue to operate orphanages, vocational centers, and health clinics with the knowledge of the government."<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> John L. Allen Jr. "A Look at the New Cardinals," *Nation Catholic Reporter* 3, No. 6 [homepage on-line]; available at <http://nationalcatholicrepoter.org/word/pfw100303.htm>; internet; accessed on 26 February 2005.

<sup>225</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 15 September 2004), Sec 2, "Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom."

<sup>226</sup> Fund for Reconciliation and Development, "Foreign Religious Organizations in Vietnam: Law and Practice," September 2004; 5 [homepage on-line]; viewed at <http://www.ffrd.org/Foreign%20Religious%20organizations%20in%Vietnam.pdf>; Internet; accessed on 15 December 2004.

<sup>227</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 15 September 2004), Sec 2, "Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom."

### 3. Foreign Non-governmental Organizations

The Catholic Church's role within society has been bolstered by the proliferation of foreign non-governmental agencies who operate in Vietnam today. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has worked in Vietnam since 1994 as a registered foreign NGO. CRS focuses on support to education, emergency situations, agriculture, and microfinance projects. In 2004, Catholic Relief Services officially opened its first office in Hanoi.

In 2004, there were 450 international foreign based non-governmental organizations registered with People's Aid Coordinating Committee.<sup>228</sup> At least 50 of the 450 were religious-based NGOs. These foreign based religious NGOs are allowed to carry out projects which are not religiously affiliated. Additionally, these NGOs are not allowed to assist Vietnamese religious groups carry out humanitarian activities.

### E. LEVEL OF ACTIVITY

In addition to the Church's increased participation in providing social services, a brief examination of changes in the overall Church activity level is also helpful in exposing areas in which the ability to practice religion has increased for Catholics in Vietnam. Unfortunately, easily quantifiable data on overall church attendance for given dioceses are unavailable. However, other available indicators do show a positive increase in Church activity levels. These indicators are, first the resumption of Vietnam's largest Catholic pilgrimage and Catholic festival, second, the comparison of basic Church statistics from 1998 to statistics from 2004, third, observations made in reports by international observers on positive changes in Church activity in Vietnam.

#### 1. The La Vang Pilgrimage

In 1798, the Virgin Mary was believed to have appeared to a group of Catholics fleeing troops sent by Emperor Canh Tinh. Near the village of La Vang, the Holy Mother reportedly sheltered and gave guidance to the pursued group. Years later during French colonization, a church was built at the site to commemorate the apparition. Beginning in 1901, every third year on August 15 thousands of Catholic faithful made the pilgrimage to La Vang to celebrate the visitation of the Virgin Mary. The La Vang pilgrimage and

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<sup>228</sup> The People's Aid Coordinating Committee is charged with tracking all international NGO's in Vietnam; See Fund for Reconciliation and Development, "Foreign Religious Organizations in Vietnam: Law and Practice," September 2004; 1.

festival is the largest gathering in Vietnam.<sup>229</sup> The pilgrimage and festival was cancelled in 1975 when the Communist took over the South.<sup>230</sup>

During the war with the United States, the shrine to the Holy Mother at La Vang also became known as a symbol of anti-communism. In 1961, former president of the Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, led a pilgrimage of over 250,000 Vietnamese there. Because of the pilgrimage's ability to assemble huge numbers of people for non-state sanctioned reasons and its association with Ngo Dinh Diem and anti-communism, the Vietnamese government attempted to block the pilgrimage and ban the associated festival. The VCP saw in the La Vang pilgrimage a probable anti-communist rallying point.

Small numbers of devout Catholics continued to attempt the pilgrimage from 1975 to 1988. During this time period, however, the government openly opposed and prevented pilgrims from making the pilgrimage.<sup>231</sup> The pilgrimage and festival resumed in 1988 when the Archbishop of Hue defied police threats and openly led pilgrims to the church at La Vang.<sup>232</sup> The police did not stop the pilgrims and the pilgrimage was successful. Since 1988 the pilgrimage has continued uninterrupted. In 1996, the number of pilgrims exceeded 100,000 people.<sup>233</sup>

The two hundredth anniversary of the aberration of the Virgin Mary at La Vang provided a special case for the VCP to see how it would deal with what promised to be not only a large draw in the domestic arena but also internationally. In anticipation of the huge crowds for the 200th anniversary, and in an attempt to minimize what could become a huge crowd, the Vietnamese government imposed restrictions on travel to La Vang during the time of the pilgrimage and celebration. The government stated that the restrictions were simply a part of the government's policy of thrift as it was an attempt to recover from the 1997 Asia economic crisis. Specifically, the government banned the

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<sup>229</sup> Templer, *passim*, 267-268.

<sup>230</sup> Templer, 267-268.

<sup>231</sup> Amnesty International, "Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly – Prisoner of Conscience [homepage on-line]; viewed at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGASA410052001>; internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>232</sup> Templer, *ibid*.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*

advertisement of the pilgrimage and also banned travel firms from taking foreigners to the festival.<sup>234</sup> The VCP saw an exceptionally large gathering at La Vang as allowing anti-government elements to mobilize the attendees against the Party. Nevertheless, Catholic bishops encouraged the festival and freely relayed the Pope's message to Vietnam which encouraged participation in the pilgrimage to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Virgin Mary's apparition.<sup>235</sup> In the end, over 200,000 Vietnamese made the pilgrimage in spite of the governments' attempts to dissuade pilgrims.<sup>236</sup> The dissuasion was limited to rhetoric and did not extend to open action to oppose the pilgrimage as in years past.<sup>237</sup>

The resumption of the La Vang festival is a significant indicator of increased religious activity in several ways. First, a massive gathering not controlled by the VCP was allowed. This showed a degree of tolerance of civil society which was completely absent during Vietnam's period of autarky. Second, the festival associated with the pilgrimage was originally cast by the VCP as an anti-communist event. By allowing the festival to take place, the VCP is able to show case the pilgrimage and festival as an example of religious freedom in Vietnam. The change in the VCP's behavior towards religious festivals from the period of autarky to the period of international integration suggests that such integration helped inspire the VCP to ease restrictions on religious activity.

## 2. Comparison of Church Statistics from 1998 to 2004

A simple comparison of Church statistics, clearly shows the Catholic Church in Vietnam is growing:

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<sup>234</sup> "Vietnam Communist Leader Says Festival Ban for 'Thrift,'" *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 5 May 1998; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=7557>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>235</sup> "Vietnam Government Restricts Marian Pilgrimage," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 30 July 1998; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=8195>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>236</sup> Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 1999, 2.

<sup>237</sup> The pilgrimage and festival have continued unabated. The most recent 2004 pilgrimage La Vang festival saw over 100,000 faithful make the pilgrimage.

Table 2. General Statistics about Vietnam.<sup>238</sup>

	1998	2004
Total Catholics	4,952,605	5,303,445
Priests	2200	2410
Bishops	33	36
Seminarians	548	1,044

The Vatican's information agency reported in 2002 that the Catholic Church in Vietnam grew by 14.4 percent from 1997-2002 while the Vietnamese general population grew by only 5.3 percent.<sup>239</sup> This indicates the reasons for the increase in the total number of Catholics from 1998 to 2004 is a result of new members joining the Church, not just a natural increase in population. An increase in the number of converts indicates some working missionary or proselytizing program. This in turn indicates a certain amount of freedom necessary to perform a proselytization program. Even though during this period the government continued to impose restrictions on the Catholic Church in Vietnam, the Church enjoyed enough freedom to grow. Also, the increased numbers of priest and bishops is significant in that it shows the VCP allowed the Catholic clergy to actually increase in size. The doubling of the number priesthood candidates who can enter the seminary in the last five years is very significant. Church leaders in Vietnam have long complained that the government does not allow enough Catholics to enter the seminary in order to keep up with the Church needs. The fact the number of seminarians has doubled indicates the government is less concerned about keeping the number seminary students low. This statistic does not, however, indicate whether or not the government will allow the increased number of seminarians to actually be ordained and become priests. This remains to be seen.

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<sup>238</sup> I extrapolated my data from the above table from a 1998 UN Human Rights Report on Vietnam and a personal email I received from the Press Attaché of Vietnam Embassy. See United Nations Commission on Human Rights. "Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Religious Intolerance." *Addendum: Visit to Vietnam*. 1998, par 41; and personal email from Socialist Republic of Vietnam's Embassy in the United States, Press Attaché, also ref. <http://www.vietnamebassy-usa.org>.

<sup>239</sup> "Church Growing in Vietnam Despite Restrictions," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 15 January 2002; available from <http://www.cwnnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=17210>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

### 3. International Observations of Increased Church Activity

One of the most consistent indicators of increased activity in the Catholic Church in Vietnam comes from the observations and reports from numerous international organizations and NGO's operating in Vietnam. Taken as whole, these reports point towards the same overall trend of an increase in religious freedom and increased attention to religious observances.

During a visit to the Vatican in 1996, bishops reported that at the parish level, daily life was good for Catholics. The bishops reported Catholics were able to attend mass, receive sacraments, and pray with their family in their home.<sup>240</sup> Most telling is how every U.S. State Department report on religion in Vietnam from 1996 through 2004 reports increased participation in religious activities. The 1996 report described the increase in religious participation as an "increase spread of religious activities."<sup>241</sup> The 1997 report described religious participation as "spread[ing] significantly" throughout the country.<sup>242</sup> Beginning in 1998, each report through 2004 has reported that "participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow significantly."<sup>243</sup> These reports show many areas in which religious freedom in Vietnam is still lacking. However, they all consistently show a sustained increase in religious participation throughout the country.

Catholics in Vietnam still face restrictions in their ability to actively participate in Church and other religious activities. However, since Vietnam emerged from isolation it has begun to engage the world, religious activity has consistently grown. This trend

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<sup>240</sup> "Church in Vietnam Lives with Restraints," *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 30 December 1996; available from <http://www.cwnnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=3348>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>241</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices—1996: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 30 January 1997); Sec 2, "Freedom of Religion"; accessed at <http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net/English/documents/vietnam-State96.htm>; internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>242</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices—1997: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 30 January 1998); Sec 2, "Freedom of Religion"; accessed at <http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net/English/documents/vietnam-State97.htm>; internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>243</sup> For full citations for the 1998 through 2004 U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam*, please reference the bibliography under U.S. Department of State and the corresponding year.



indicates a correlation between increased exposure to international influences and norms to increased religious activity.

#### F. CHANGES IN GOVERNMENTAL REGULATIONS OF RELIGION

The basic framework with which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam regulates religious institutions was first laid out in Resolution 287 in 1977<sup>244</sup>. Resolution 287 remained in effect unchanged until 1991 when Decree 69 superseded it. In 1999 a new decree on religion, Decree 26, was implemented. Finally, in November 2004, the “Ordinance on Belief and Religion” was brought into effect superseding the previous decree. In spite of three rewrites to the law governing religion and religious institutions, the basics of Resolution 287 have remained essentially intact.<sup>245</sup> Cardinal Pham Dinh Tung expressed a sentiment common in Vietnam about new religious laws. In reference to the 1999 Decree on Religion, the Cardinal stated that it is not much different from earlier decrees.<sup>246</sup> While the laws remain basically the same—subjecting religious freedom and subjecting religious institutions to state control—changes in the laws after *Doi Moi* reflect a subtle improvement in the VCP’s view and treatment of religious institutions.

Decree on Religion 26 in 1999 gives people the right to freely exercise religion, with the significant caveat that the government retains absolute control and say over religion.<sup>247</sup> The politburo stated that “the government will issue regulations and detailed guidance for activities of religious orders and groups, on fund raising and financial operations, humanitarian activities, building and repairing places of worship, religious training and other activities.”<sup>248</sup> The 2004 decree encourages religions to engage in

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<sup>244</sup> See Chapter 3, Sec. 2 for more details on Resolution.

<sup>245</sup> The basics of Resolution 287 include all religious institutions must register with the government, coordinate with government about all operations, obtain permission to hold training meetings, conventions, celebrations, build or repair a chapel, engage in charity activities, operate schools, train, ordain, promote, or transfer clergy.

<sup>246</sup> “Years of Challenges for Vietnamese Cardinal,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 29 June 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=10643>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>247</sup> “Vietnam Clamps Down on Religion,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 8 July 1998; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=8056>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

certain types of charity activity.<sup>249</sup> The decree also suggests the government is more prepared to allow religious institutions and individuals to participate in humanitarian work without acquiring specific government support first.<sup>250</sup> The decree specifies that the government encourages charity activities be done “according to the law.” The inclusion of the terms like “humanitarian” and “charity” activities in the 1999 and 2004 laws is a new subtle recognition that religion has a legitimate role in society in addition to purely religious functions.

The 1999 and 2004 laws also make fewer references to direct state control of religion. This is likely an attempt by the VCP to counter its critics and change the international perception of Vietnam as a country that suppresses and controls religion. Discussing the new 2004 law on religion, Vietnamese leaders stated that the “state needs to allow greater religious freedom if for no other reason than to enhance the government’s image.”<sup>251</sup>

#### G. A TACIT INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS

A telling indicator of the increased ability to exercise religion among Catholic in Vietnam today is the tacit international consensus that the situation is slowly but steadily improving. Every international organization, NGO, or government report on the human rights or religious freedom in Vietnam shows abuses to religious freedom in Vietnam and areas in which the government could improve religious freedom; however, they also all tell another, not so explicit implicit, story: over the last ten years Vietnam has experienced sustained improvements in the area of religious freedom.

During his 10-day visit to Vietnam in 1998, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Religious Freedom, Abdelfattah Amor, found religion to function

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<sup>249</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices—2004: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 30 January 2005); Sec 2, “Freedom of Religion”; accessed at <http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net/English/documents/vietnam-State04.htm>; internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

<sup>250</sup> Magda Hornemann, “Vietnam: Implementation Will Test New Religious Ordinance,” *Forum 18*, 21 September 2004 [homepage on-line]; viewed at [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=415&printer=Y](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=415&printer=Y); internet; accessed on 20 January 2005.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

“as an instrument of policy rather than a component of society.”<sup>252</sup> Mr. Amor reported that Vietnam’s tight control over religion was intended to prevent the emergence of any group that might challenge the VCP. In spite of problems, he noted that since 1990, the Vietnamese government has in fact made some improvements in its “anti-religious” policies.<sup>253</sup> Assessing the situation for religion in Vietnam for good and for ill, Amor reported:

Vietnamese policy on religious matters generally reflects, on the one hand, a gradual improvement in religious freedom, but in very limited areas subject to restrictions and, on the other, the maintenance of restrictions and checks by authorities anxious to prevent the establishment of organizations capable of questioning their authority and influence.<sup>254</sup>

The significant point is that there have been improvements, even through, as the Special Rapporteur states, they are in “very limited areas.” He comments on what is driving this change in Vietnam:

Vietnam’s religious policy has undergone changes since 1990, Radical changes in the world resulting from the end of the cold war and fall of the Berlin Wall, together with globalization, have induced the authorities to become more open in an effort to maintain their hold on power.<sup>255</sup>

This process has resulted in more freedom of religion for Catholics. As this process of globalization is intensified, it will likely produce more freedoms.

In addition to consistent reporting of increased religious participation in U.S. State Department reports on religion in Vietnam other organizations draw similar conclusions about religious activity in Vietnam.<sup>256</sup> Amnesty International reported: “In the years following reunification in Viet Nam, religious activity was very tightly controlled ... While there is now a greater degree of religious freedom in Viet Nam than

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<sup>252</sup> “UN Envoy Says Vietnam Still too Restrictive of Religion,” *Catholic World News* [home page online]; 17 March 1999; available from <http://www.cwnnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=9855>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>253</sup> “UN Envoy Says Vietnam Still too Restrictive of Religion,” *Catholic World News*.

<sup>254</sup> United Nations Commission on Human Rights, “Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Religious Intolerance,” *Addendum: Visit to Vietnam*. 1998, par 36.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, par 33.

<sup>256</sup> See section 5, C

there was a decade ago, restrictions remain.”<sup>257</sup> This report by Amnesty International, which goes to great length to document continued restrictions and abuses against religion, suggests that even one of the traditionally hardest judges of states’ human rights records accepts that Vietnam is changing in accordance with international norms.

In addition the comments and testimony of many international organizations and their representatives who have visited Vietnam and commented on the state of religion attest to this change. They too indicate the existence of a tacit international consensus that there religious freedom is slowly improving in Vietnam. In 2004 during a Senate hearing discussing the future of U.S.-Vietnamese relations in the context of trade and human rights, John Hanford, United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, testified that during his recent visit to Vietnam he saw things improving for religion. Ambassador Hanford testified:

My Staff and I did indeed observe flourishing religious activity in many places and in many faiths, and of course we regard the relative freedom these believers enjoy as a welcome development.<sup>258</sup>

During the same hearing, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew P. Daley testified that in some areas Vietnam today is “a less repressive society now than ten, or even five years ago.”<sup>259</sup> Specifically, Assistant Secretary Daley testified that reports coming out to the U.S. embassy in Vietnam indicate freedom of religion has expanded.<sup>260</sup>

Positive reports concerning the situation of religion in Vietnam are not just limited to U.S. government reports. In 1999, the United States National Conference of Catholics sent a delegation to Vietnam. Upon completion of the visit, the Archbishop

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<sup>257</sup> Amnesty International, “Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly – Prisoner of Conscience.”

<sup>258</sup> Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Trade and Human Rights: The Future of U.S.-Vietnamese Relations: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 12 February 2004. Testimony of John Hanford, Ambassador at Large: Office of International Religious Freedom, Department of State; viewed at <http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2004/hr040212.html>; accessed on 20 January 2005.

<sup>259</sup> Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Trade and Human Rights: The Future of U.S.-Vietnamese Relations: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 12 February 2004. Testimony of Mathew P. Daley, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State; viewed at <http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2004/hr040212.html>; accessed on 20 January 2004.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

who led the group reported new signs of religious tolerance.<sup>261</sup> More recently in 2004 during a visit to Hanoi, a senior Vatican official reported that he feels “religious freedom is expanding in Vietnam” in spite of the fact much work still needs to be done.<sup>262</sup>

#### H. VCP RECOGNITION OF INTERNATIONAL NORMS

Vietnam’s burgeoning international trade relationships have also impacted Vietnam’s view and treatment of religion. As Vietnam signs or enters into sought-after trading relationships, concessions to ensure human rights and religious freedom are often included in the agreement. Many of Vietnam’s new economic partners strive to ensure they are not trading with or supporting a regime which abuses human rights and suppresses freedom of religion. Two brief examples of this are Vietnam’s relation with the European Union and the United States—both major trading partners. In 1995 the European Union and Vietnam signed trade agreements which covered trade, investment, and human rights. In 1997, 2000, 2001, and most recently in 2003, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning human rights violations in Vietnam, especially the suppression of religious groups. Each time Vietnam adamantly disputed the resolutions and accused the European Parliament of meddling in Vietnam’s internal affairs.<sup>263</sup> In 2001 Vietnam and the United States ratified a bilateral trade agreement. In 2003, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that the United States was Vietnam’s largest single export market with 21.75 percent of Vietnam’s total exports.<sup>264</sup> European Union countries made up another 23.91 percent of Vietnam’s export market.<sup>265</sup> Vietnam does not bow to the United States or the European Union, but with such a large

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<sup>261</sup> “US Bishop Report Progress on Religious Freedom in Vietnam,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 1 September 1999; available from <http://www.cwnnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=10992>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>262</sup> “Vietnam Envoy Sees Progress Toward Religious Freedom in Vietnam,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 13 May 2004; available from <http://www.cwnnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=29547>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>263</sup> “Vietnam Disputes Allegations of Human Rights Violations,” *Catholic World News* [home page on-line]; 19 May 1997; available from <http://www.cwnnews.com/news/storytools.cfm?task=print&recnum=4995>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2005.

<sup>264</sup> International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics*, March 2005 [CD-ROM] (Washington: Publication Services, International Monetary Fund).

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

percentage of its foreign export market, Vietnam cannot turn a deaf ear to international pressures from the United States or the European Union. Religious sources from within Vietnam have argued that diplomatic pressure and intervention, particularly from the United States, is a major reason why the Vietnamese government has granted more religious freedoms and legalized more religious groups.<sup>266</sup>

As Vietnam establishes diplomatic relations and trading relations with the United States, the European Union, and others, they began pressuring and lobbying for increases in freedom of religion, human rights, and other forms of liberalization in Vietnam. Vietnam's increasingly complex degree of interdependence makes the potential cost of not listening to and implementing the international norms and standards increasingly costly for Vietnam. The VCP wants to ensure trade and development continues so it can maintain legitimacy and stay in power. During Vietnam's period of autarky, the government had little incentive to listen to or follow anyone else's standards. Today though, this is not the case.

## I. CONCLUSION

Participation in religious activities, and to a lesser degree, freedom of religion, has generally improved for the Catholic Church in Vietnam since Vietnam began embracing globalization in 1987. Vietnam still actively restricts and controls the Catholic Church, but the degree of restriction and control today is significantly less than compared to during Vietnam's period of autarky. Many positive changes in the VCP's view and treatment of the Catholic Church have followed Vietnam's integration into the global economy and community. As Vietnam has become more internationally interdependent, Vietnam has become increasingly sensitive to international norms and standards: if not fully embracing them, it at least maintains the appearance of gradually adopting international norms and standards.

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<sup>266</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices—2004: Vietnam* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) 30 January 2005; Sec 2, "Freedom of Religion"; accessed at <http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net/English/documents/vietnam-State04.htm>; internet; viewed on 16 November 2004.

To improve the government's international image to ensure necessary economic relations are not damaged, Vietnam claims it provides freedom of religion. The trend towards religious tolerance from 1987 to 2004 suggests that further small but substantial concessions to religion are likely. Already we have seen movement on public admissions of religion as a positive societal force, allowing religions to participate in charity, permitting international travel of and substantial increases in the number of priests, and the resumption of large religious festivals. As Vietnam becomes more internationally interconnected, the VCP seems to make more concessions and gestures of increasing acceptance of the Catholic Church and religious freedom. Gradually, these gestures are trickling down to the people and affecting real positive change in religious freedom. This is a long-term, gradual process that should continue.

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## V. CONCLUSION

Historically the Vietnamese Communist Party has distrusted and suspected the Catholic Church of attempting to undermine the Party's power and legitimacy. Inherent conflicts between religion and Communist ideology further exacerbated the Party's negative view and treatment of the Church. During the period of autarky from 1975 to 1986, Vietnam charted a course apart from meaningful global economic and diplomatic relations. By 1986, the VCP's policies had pushed Vietnam's economy and society to the brink of collapse. The Party faced a legitimacy crisis far broader than any perceived threat from the Catholic Church. In response, the Party instituted the *Doi Moi* reforms and slowly began liberalizing its economy and embracing the international community. Vietnam's subsequent international integration resulted in a reverse course for Vietnam's failing economy and a move from a position of isolation vis-à-vis the international community to a position of growing interdependence. This new integration had a profound impact on Vietnam's view and treatment of the Catholic Church.

By the end of 1986, the Catholic Church was still viewed as suspect and inherently anti-revolutionary. The Church was subject to numerous restrictions. These restrictions resulted in the marginalization of the Catholic laity and the prevention of Catholics from actively exercising their faith. Vietnam's policies towards the Catholic Church were carried out by first suppressing elements within the Church that could lead or support overt opposition. Next, the government took away the Church's ability and capacity to autonomously lead and guide civil society. Finally, the government established a means to co-opt the Church such that functionally and institutionally the Church would act as a social and political agent for the VCP. The Catholic Church's marginalized situation began to slowly change as Vietnam embraced the *Doi Moi* reforms after 1986.

Vietnam's integration into the world economy and community beginning in 1987 led to an improved degree of religious freedom for the Catholic Church. The restrictions and controls placed upon the Church during the present period of international interdependence compared to during autarky has decreased. The increased degree of

religious freedom is evident through the improved view and treatment of the Catholic Church.

The Vietnamese government may continue to harbor suspicions and reservations about the Catholic Church in private; however, its public pronouncements and dialogue with the Catholic Church as a whole are now positive. The Party's public view of the Church during in the past twenty years has changed from that of an anti-communist agent of the Capitalist West to that of a positive force and partner, albeit junior partner, striving to develop and advance Vietnamese society.

The most dramatic public pronouncement of the Party's changed view towards religion came during the Seventh Party Congress in 1991. During this congress the Party recognized for the first time that "most people have a spiritual need for religions and [belief]" in their life.<sup>267</sup> At this time the party also recognized that religion was "particularly useful for building a new society."<sup>268</sup> The new official view of religion emphasized the need for tolerance, increased freedom of worship, and to limit the government's "power to interfere in religious affairs."<sup>269</sup> This dramatic change coincided with Vietnam's plan to reach out and establish international relations with all friendly nations—an unlikely coincidence.

Today, rigid requirements are still in place which require the Church to obtain government permission to carry out most religious functions. However, the significant difference for the Church as a whole compared to during the period of autarky is today the government readily gives permission. Today, as Vietnam becomes increasingly interdependent, Catholics can freely attend mass and the Church can more freely organize special meetings and gatherings. The Vatican's working relationship and regular dialogue with Hanoi is one of the most positive changes to come about during Vietnam's period of integration. Today all 25 of Vietnam's dioceses are led by functional bishops. This was not the case until 2003. During autarky, the government prevented, impeded, and severely delayed the ordination of new priests and bishops. The resultant shortage of

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<sup>267</sup> United Nations Commission on Human Rights, "Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Religious Intolerance." *Addendum: Visit to Vietnam*. 1998, par 33.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, par 34.

priests and bishops in many parishes and dioceses caused the laity to be spread too thin to adequately administer to the needs of parishioners. Today, as a result of regular talks between the Vatican and Hanoi, the number of new priests allowed by the government is increasing. In addition to much increased Church activity levels, the Catholic Church is allowed to assist society directly in non-religious ways: running schools, hospices, and orphanages. Finally, the government allows Vietnamese priests to travel overseas and participate in international Catholic functions and organizations. However, in spite of these positive steps, international standards of religious freedom require more

Vietnam's integration into the international system is the main reason for the improvements to religious freedom. As Vietnam decided to renovate its economy by adopting market reforms and embracing international markets, Vietnam quickly realized that to be successful, it needed to be respected by other members of the international community or at least avoid international sanctions for religious and human rights suppression. Many of Vietnam's harsh command economy and autocratic policies did not endear Vietnam to the international community—in particular human rights and freedom of religion. To show that Vietnam was a serious international actor who subscribed to the same norms and values as others in the international community, Vietnam began using rhetoric which embraced freedom of religion.

Vietnam also sought to initiate dialogue and establish relations with all friendly states—including the Vatican. Although the Vatican and Vietnam have not yet established formal diplomatic relations, many improvements in the government's view and treatment of the Catholic Church have been greatly influenced by 15 years of dialogue. Through Vatican lobbying, the Vietnamese government successfully built a nascent relationship of trust with the Catholic hierarchy, and most significantly, Vatican officials were able to persuade Vietnamese officials to permit much needed ordinations.

The Catholic Church and other religious institutions in Vietnam continue to face persecutions and restrictions. However, if a religious group works with the government, then that group can receive permission for religious functions and activities. When religion is connected with open criticism of the government, the VCP interprets the criticism as a threat to the Party's dominance and synonymously a threat to national security. For Catholics and other religions willing to work within the system, there is

much improved ability to express and practice religion. For those who openly oppose the government, the government severely restricts and suppresses them. Mixing politics with religion in Vietnam is an open invitation to be suppressed.

My case study has shown that Vietnam's overall view and treatment of the Catholic Church has improved since Vietnam emerged from autarky and began embracing global integration. The process has been slow, but improvements have taken place. United States policy makers must continue to take this into account when establishing policy for Vietnam. Policy makers must be willing to demonstrate patience and allow for the situation in Vietnam to improve slowly as Vietnam continues to integrate further into the international economy and community.

There are two basic approaches to dealing with religious freedom in Vietnam: first, engage Vietnam and by so doing draw it into further international interdependence; second, isolate them through coercive and punitive measures. This thesis has shown that when Vietnam was in a condition of autarky, isolation, severe restrictions and control of religious institutions resulted in a egregious lack of religious freedom. The condition we see Vietnam presently in—international integration—has coincided with many improvements to Vietnam's view and treatment of religion. Thus, to further religious freedom in Vietnam, policy makers should implement policies that will engage Vietnam and move it towards increased international interdependence. In a larger context, when dealing with regimes who do not march in step with internationally accepted democratic norms policy makers must consider whether to use means of engagement and economic incentives to promote liberal values and standards, or uses to punitive methods such as sanctions to force a regime to acquiesce to new norms and abrogate the old. Engagement, which increases a country's degree of interdependence in the global community, makes it more difficult for non-democratic regimes with post-totalitarian characteristics to successfully enforce non-democratic autocratic policies—specifically towards religion.

How does this hypothesis apply regarding U.S. policy towards Vietnam? Michael Young, the Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, in a testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee testified that, “increased trade has not led to progress in the area of protecting human rights and basic liberties. And

quiet diplomacy alone has not produced tangible results.”<sup>270</sup> However, my findings suggests that his argument is only partly correct, that there has been progress in protecting religious freedom in Vietnam. Overall, since Vietnam began substantially integrating and trading internationally in 1987, some progress has come about, though overtly political and ethnically based, religious groups have experienced suppression after 2001.<sup>271</sup> Young is correct to state that “quite diplomacy alone” is ineffective in bringing about positive changes. So what needs to be done?

In 2004, Vietnam was designated by the State Department a “country of particular concern (CPC).” The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 allows the State Department to designate a country a CPC if that country meets certain criteria. The CPC designation was designed to be a flexible diplomatic tool. It provides the President with an array of options to address abuses of religious freedom.<sup>272</sup> In addition to sending a strong signal that U.S. interests include freedom of religion, the designation also gives the President or the Secretary of State the authority to use sanctions to address severe abuses of religious freedom. The use, or even threat or sanctions is a slippery slope, as they may push a country towards isolationism. Neither do they engage nor increase interdependency. For this reason, the United States should not implement or even threaten sanctions. Rather than punish, the United States should reward for positive behavior and generally encourage extensive contacts and interactions with Vietnam. The U.S. should sponsor more exchange programs within Vietnamese business, education, government, and military.

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<sup>270</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, *Trade and Human Rights: The Future of U.S.-Vietnamese Relations: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 12 February 2004. Testimony of Michael Young, Chairman, The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom; viewed at <http://www.uscirf.gov/hearings/12Feb04/Brownback.php3?mode=print>; Internet; viewed on 20 January 2005

<sup>271</sup> These groups are especially problematic, as mentioned in my introduction, when differentiating between the suppression of religious freedom and the suppression of anti-regime elements. Some of the protestant churches among the central highlands ethnic minorities are directly affiliated separatist groups seeking an autonomous state. The Vietnamese government is not unjustly suspicious of protestant house church’s among ethnic minority groups in the central highlands of facilitating anti-regime sentiments and separatists movements.

<sup>272</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, *Trade and Human Rights: The Future of U.S.-Vietnamese Relations: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 12 February 2004. Testimony of Michael Young.

The United States must continue to engage Vietnam and avoid actions which would turn Vietnam towards the dark condition of isolation. As shown here, the Catholic Church's overall degree of religious freedom was greater during Vietnam's period of international integration than during its previous period of autarky. A primary reason for the increased degree of religious freedom experienced by the Catholic Church came as a result of Vietnam's increased global interdependence and resulting sensitivity to international norms and standards. The Catholic Church's experience in Vietnam during periods of autarky and interdependence suggests that, as an autocratic state becomes increasingly globally integrated and internationally interdependent, a nascent civil society will begin to evolve and society in general will tend to liberalize under the new global pressures and influences. International engagement and outreach is most likely to foster that trend.

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